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## Why Do Students Abandon Programs Prior to Completion?: An Investigation Into the Phenomenon of Dropout Students From the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, DIT.

Ann Teresa  
*Conway*

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**Why do students abandon programs prior to completion?**  
**An investigation into the phenomenon of dropout students from the**  
**Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, DIT.**

**Ann Teresa Conway**

**A thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements for**  
**Masters of Arts (MA) in Third Level Learning and Teaching**

**Presented to the:**

**Learning and Teaching Centre,**  
**Dublin Institute of Technology, 14 Upper Mount Street.**

**Submitted to:**

**Dr. Frank McMahon**

**June 2004**

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis, which I now submit for examination for the award of MA in Learning and Teaching, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulation of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in any other Institute or University.

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Signed: Ann Conway Date: 21/6/04

*“It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has the data.”*

*Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*



## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to examine how students experience education at the Dublin Institute of Technology. What happens to them that influences their decision to leave their course of choice and what can we do to help? In this thesis I have looked at the phenomenon of dropout students from the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management in DIT and the factors that influence their choice of course and then subsequent withdrawal from this course. I have interviewed a student who has left another course to pursue the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management to examine if her reasons for leaving a course and choosing another are similar. I have also spoken with a student who has progressed onto a degree program having at one point in her student life in DIT wanted to dropout from the Diploma. This research was conducted in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism. It supports previous research by the Retention Office into the reasons of student dropout.

Students said that completing the application for college was not given enough time and also that there was insufficient information provided to them from college prospectuses. In relation to their teaching and learning experiences most students reflected that it was difficult to settle into some subjects and independent learning was a new and daunting experience for them. Supports were also important to them in the form of student's services and career guidance; however their feelings varied each year with the student union, whereas the careers service was not viewed as being helpful. Financial support also affected some students.

Recommendations were made and are as follows:

- Compulsory attendance at induction where existing students of the college can welcome new students to the college. Students interviewed saw induction periods as positive
- Tracking of students through registers or other means.
- Mentoring through student-to-student 'buddy' systems.
- Professional and industry involvement can highlight careers in the industry.
- Career education provided through the tutors, lecturers, careers services and student services within the college and through Alumni visits.

From the above recommendations the following conclusions were drawn from the thesis:

- Get to know our students, provide mentor and use appropriate tracking systems;
- Student lecturer interaction outside of the classroom is important and time should be allocated for this for all lecturers.
- Allocation of lecturers as tutors is vital for visibility of support;
- Student support networks in place in colleges and ongoing liaising with schools is also vitally important;
- Course information must improve and be provided to all potential students via open days, prospectuses or direct marketing;
- Recognise that all students are individuals and retention should be done on a course basis which should be staggered throughout the year.

## **Acknowledgements**

First of all I wish to thank all the participants of my research. Predominantly these were ex students and some current students of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Dublin Institute of Technology, who took part in my focus group and individual case study interviews. Without their cooperation and interest in my research this thesis would not have been completed.

My sincere gratitude to Dr. Frank McMahon, my supervisor, for his patience and guidance throughout my research and through to completion of this thesis.

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Jose, thanking you for putting up with me, but this is just the beginning.

Thanks to Mam and Dad. I said once before that this was it...well I'm sorry, I lied! ;-).

## **Glossary**

CAO	Central Applications Office
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
Dundalk IT	Dundalk Institute of Technology
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ITIC	Irish Tourism Industry Confederation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PLC	Post Leaving Certificate
USI	Union of Students of Ireland
WebCT	Web based communication tool

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**Chapter One: Introduction**



## 1. 0. Introduction

Education in its broadest sense is normally thought to be about acquiring and being able to use knowledge and developing skills and understanding, i.e. cognitive capabilities. It can be claimed that, as humans, we are identified by our capacity to learn, communicate and reason.

We are involved in these things throughout our lives and in all situations. From the earliest times people have learnt from one another in family and social groups. As society became larger and more complex, so education systems became more formalised and expanded. We still learn from those around us but the education system now also plays a large part in all our lives, (Bartlett *et al*, 2001; 3). Often in today's modern competitive society, learning involves both individual choice and external direction and control in the presence of teachers, lecturers and family. Personal awareness of education is shaped by a number of individual experiences and also some questions one might ask about education such as:

1. Is education a process? Is this something we go through over a period of years or throughout our lifetime?
2. Is education a product to be consumed? Is there a 'sell by' or 'use by' date? Is the student who defers, transfers or leaves one education course to pursue work or another course gone beyond the 'use by' date if he or she views education as a lifelong process?
3. What does education involve? Is it all about exams, assessments, and attendance in class? As individuals at work can learn from their co-workers and gain experiences just as a student who attends classes and sits exams learns in a different way, all students learn in different ways and therefore the scenario of attendance, assessment and exam could be restricting for a lot of students.
4. Where does education take place? Are colleges, schools and universities the only places that education can take place? The answer has to be no as it can also be via ICT (information and communication technology) at home or at work and carries on beyond school, colleges and universities.

(Adapted from Bartlett *et al*, 2001; 1)

The higher education system in Ireland is broad in scope and encompasses the university sector, the technological sector, the colleges of education and private, independent colleges. Ireland is a society undergoing major change – economic, demographic and regional. These changes inevitably influence the flows of students and make new demands in relation to a changing higher educational response. In an economy as open as Ireland's, it is vital that technological and higher education operate to maximum effectiveness responding to changing societal needs (O'Cathain, 2002).

Not only are demographic changes taking place within the Irish population but in addition, significant challenges are being imposed on higher education providers to retain as many students as possible within the higher education system. Yorke (1999) noted that many students leave higher education prematurely and about 50% of these students do so during, or at the end of their first year in college (Costello, 2003). Some non-completion of courses is unavoidable and should not be viewed as failure by the student, tutor or college, but acknowledged that dropping out is likely (Oliver, 2001). However, a lot of non-completion is preventable and it is the responsibility of the college to help retain their students (Yorke, 1999).

Retention rates in Universities, DIT and other institutes have been the subject of a number of recent studies (Flanagan *et al*, 2000; Morgan *et al*, 2001; Finnegan and Barrett, 2000; Morgan and Kellaghan, 2002), and numerous studies by Costello *et al*. Morgan and Kelleghan (2002) raised the issue of the lack of motivation and lack of preparedness of some students. This survey also highlighted the poor attendance record for some, and that other students were working during term time (McDonagh and Patterson, 2002). With less time on study, little time for reading for pleasure, and more time spent working and watching television, students' decreased involvement in learning is well established by the time they reach third level (Lindsay and Bolger, 2002).

The aim of this thesis is to examine how students experience education at the Dublin Institute of Technology. What happens to them that influences their decision to leave their course of choice and what can we do to help?

In this thesis I have looked at the phenomenon of dropout students from the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management in DIT and the factors that influence their choice of course and then subsequent withdrawal from this course. I have interviewed a student who has left another course to pursue the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management to examine if her reasons for leaving a course and choosing another are similar. I have also spoken with a student who has progressed onto a degree program having at one point in her student life in DIT wanted to dropout from the Diploma. I have analysed if her experience was similar to those students who have left and questioned what can we do that will help.

Bassey (1999) provides us with a useful starting point with what educational research is:

*Research is systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry, which aims to contribute towards the achievement of knowledge and wisdom (1999; 38; Morrison, 2002; 5).*

The following section briefly outlines what my research is and how my research will be carried out.

## **1. 1. Research Aims and Objectives**

The central aim of this thesis is to investigate if educators in DIT are delivering to our students' expectations. If their expectations are not being met, how can the progression through college be made easier for our students so that they are retained in the college system? The following are some questions I have asked myself:

1. Is there a gap between what an educational institute is providing, and what the student expects to get from college? And what about the information gaps between what the students receive pre decision-making and what is provided to them before completing their CAO (Central Applications Office) application form from colleges and career guidance?
2. What are we doing to help retain our students in college or at least help them onto courses that they would actually like to study?
3. Do we know where our students go once they leave a course by their own choice or through progression? What has happened to them? Why did they leave and where did they go?
4. What influences their choice to 'dropout' or progress onto another source of education or employment?

Costello (2003) illustrates through research carried out through the DIT retention office that 85% of the total number of students who failed to complete withdrew within or during their first year.

### **1. 1. 1. Objectives and Outcomes:**

1. To provide information to the admissions office within the DIT, especially the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, to enable them to market more effectively to students in the future;
2. To assist the retention office of the DIT with their efforts to retain students.
3. To highlight the recurring issues affecting the influence of ‘dropout’ students or students who progress onto other education or employment, and to assist students when making this choice.

## **1. 2. Research Methodology Employed**

This thesis uses a triangulation of research methodologies to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, which is student dropout. Initially retention reports from the retention office were obtained to provide the foundation to the study but it was soon to become clear that a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative approach to the research methodologies was to be employed as it was the attitudes and opinions of students who have since left the course that were important.

### **1. 2. 1. Secondary Research**

Secondary research described by Powers (1990) is information in a publicized form. DIT retention reports and DIT student numbers have been viewed and were used as a basis for this research. They are also the quantitative basis to the research.

### **1. 2. 2. Primary Research**

Primary data is information which is collected for the first time (Chisnall, 2001), and which is carried out in order to back up specific research questions (Buttle, 1986). The nature of the information can be quantitative, which relates to measuring and representing information in a statistical format, or qualitative, which deals with understanding rather than measuring, (Kotler, 1991). Qualitative research is concerned with the ‘how’ and ‘why’ rather than the ‘how much’.

### **1. 2. 3. Methods**

Research has been conducted through focus group interviews with full time students on the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management program. I have also used case study research by interviewing certain students who have 'dropped out' of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management program, who have transferred into this program from others, or from this program onto another program. Three focus group interviews were used, five interviews with students who have left the course and two interviews of students who have transferred into or from the diploma course.

### **1. 3. Outline of the Thesis Chapters**

The following is a brief presentation of the contents of the chapters contained in this thesis.

#### **1. 3. 1. Chapter One**

Chapter one introduces and provides an overview to the thesis. The chapter presents the research rationale and identifies the research aims and subsequent objectives. It also provides a brief introduction to the methods employed in the research.

#### **1. 3. 2. Chapter Two**

Chapter two reviews the literature on higher education, students as consumers, hospitality education, and the issues surrounding retention and progression of students in higher education, such as the need for induction processes, support networks and a review of the academic ability of incoming students. Initially the retention reports from the retention office within DIT were reviewed. Costello and Russell (2003) outlined the many attrition issues within the DIT and within the diploma courses in the Faculty of Tourism and Food, Cathal Brugha Street. Other literature in the area of student retention and the phenomenon of student dropout such as Tinto (1993), Martinez and Munday (1998), Healy *et al* (1999), Davies (2000), Finnegan *et al* (2000), Finnegan and Barrett (2000), Morgan *et al* (2001), Moxley *et al* (2001), Bennett (2003), Lowe and Cook (2003), Simpson (2003), Robinson (2004) and other reports were also consulted throughout the literature review.



The literature review aims to inform the reader of this thesis on the subject area and the situation of higher education in Ireland at the moment, in particular hospitality education within the Faculty of Tourism and Food in DIT, and also provides a framework upon which the primary research was based.

### **1. 3. 3. Chapter Three**

Chapter three outlines the research methods, methodology and the underpinning theoretical perspective of the research, and in particular the primary research. It outlines the two main methods used to obtain primary data collection that of focus group interviews and case study interviews. It justifies the choice of methodologies employed as it is a qualitative rather than quantitative research method required to obtain student opinions and attitudes and reasons 'why' they left rather than 'how many' left as is the case with numerous previous retention reports. The chapter outlines the primary data collection and the procedures for analysis. Research ethics and limitations of the study were also outlined.

### **1. 3. 4. Chapter Four**

Chapter four is the first of two chapters that dissects the primary research and presents the initial findings. All interviews were analysed together as the examination of all transcripts presented themes of similar opinions on student retention and dropout from all students interviewed. This first analysis chapter followed an outline presented by Martinez and Munday (1998) in their report on student retention in higher and further education in England, which indicated three areas that were important when researching student retention and progression: pre entry guidance and admissions, curriculum, teaching and learning and student supports network.

### **1. 3. 5. Chapter Five**

Chapter five follows the initial analysis of the research findings from chapter four and simply asks if the research aims and objectives have been answered. It interprets these research findings in relation to the themes and categories outlined in chapter four and analyses them in relation to the specific aims and objectives raised at the beginning of the research. This chapter seeks to bring the findings from the literature review and primary research together in a meaningful and comprehensive way.

### **1. 3. 6. Chapter Six**

Chapter six is the final chapter in the thesis and provides the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the research. The conclusions are presented as they relate to specific objectives and recommendations and suggestions for further research are outlined where relevant.

## **1. 4. Conclusion**

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the thesis, setting out the research rationale, the research aims and objectives and a concise introduction to the methodologies employed in the research. It also briefly outlines the chapters involved in the thesis.

The following chapters will provide a more in-depth review of the research into the mystery of student dropouts starting with the literature review in chapter two.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**



## 2. 0 Introduction

The higher education system in Ireland is broad in scope and encompasses the university sector, the technological sector, the colleges of education and private, independent colleges. Ireland is a society undergoing major change – economic, demographic and regional. These changes inevitably influence the flows of students and make new demands in relation to a changing higher educational response. In an economy as open as Ireland's, it is vital that technological and higher education operate to maximum effectiveness responding to changing societal needs (O'Cathain, 2002). Not only are demographic changes taking place within the Irish population but in addition, significant challenges are being imposed on higher education providers to retain as many students as possible within the higher education system.

Retention rates in Universities, DIT and other institutes have been the subject of a number of recent studies (Flanagan *et al*, 2000; Morgan *et al* 2001; Finnegan and Barrett, 2000; Morgan and Kellaghan, 2002). Morgan and Kellaghan (2002) raised the issue of the lack of motivation and lack of preparedness of some students and also highlighted the poor attendance record for some, and that other students were working during term time (cited in McDonagh and Patterson, 2002). Lindsay and Bolger (2002) recognize that with less time on study, little time for reading for pleasure, and more time spent working and watching television, students' decreased involvement in learning is well established by the time they reach higher education (Erik and Strommer, 1991; Gallo, 1997 cited in Lindsay and Bolger, 2002; 9). From the analysis of the pilot focus group interviews I conducted with students of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management in February 2003, these elements of un-preparedness, lack of motivation and being tired from part time work resulting in a poor attendance rate is also indicated as a factor for students' decision to leave the course within the first year. This also has an influence on the students' decision-making process as whether or not they have the motivation to remain in college or leave and concentrate on work instead.

Yorke (1999) noted that many students leave higher education prematurely and about 50% of these students do so during, or at the end of, their first year in college. Costello (2003) illustrates through research carried out through the DIT retention office that 85% of the total number of students who failed to complete or withdrew, did so within or during their first year. Some non-completion of courses is unavoidable and should not be viewed as failure by the student, tutor or college, but acknowledged that dropping out is likely (Oliver, 2001).

A lot of non-completion is preventable and it is the responsibility of the college to help retain their students (Yorke, 1999). The Dublin Institute of Technology through its strategic plan, *A Vision for Development 2001 – 2015*, has as one of its seven objectives to embrace a ‘supportive and caring ethos’ which includes in its goals such practical issues as to ‘provide retention support for students’ and to ‘develop an appropriate and effective mentor system.’ (Costello, 2003).

Enhanced participation in higher education is also a central theme in government policy.

There are ranges of factors that influence student enrolment. These are:

- Student Demographics;
- Participation in Higher Education;
- Access to Higher Education;
- Adult Education and use of Information Technology.

### **2. 0. 1. Student Demographics**

Fleming *et al* (1999: 35 cited in Karatzias, 2002) calculated that through the 1980’s and into the mid 1990’s the annual birth rate declined to a figure of 47,900 in 1994. This significant decline of 36% led to the lowest annual number of births and from 1995 onwards the number of births has been increasing marginally each year. Demographic shifts have an impact on the number of students enrolling in higher education, e.g. the total number of students enrolling in tertiary education in Ireland grew by 50% between 1990 and 1997. The numbers applying to third level places have dropped significantly for the first time this year from 62,500 to 60,000 (Flynn, 2004). This has been expected for a number of years because of the decline in numbers taking the leaving certificate exam but has been offset in recent years by applications made by mature students (Flynn, 2004).

### **2. 0. 2. Participation in Higher Education**

Major changes are occurring in the pattern of applications/ acceptances on full-time courses in higher education. Changes are occurring in the choice of Institute and discipline area by applicants. At the moment there is a confusing array of qualifications on offer for learners and it is therefore not surprising that the take up of many vocational courses has been so

disappointing in recent years (Clancy, 2001). Dublin has the lowest participation rates to leaving certificate and the lowest entry rate to the Institutes of Technology on certificate or diploma courses. Dublin has a relatively low university entry rate; however it has the highest rate of entry (3.4%) to private colleges (McDonagh and Patterson, 2002; p. 42).

**Table 2. 1: Total Acceptances in all Institutions and all disciplines 1996 –2002<sup>1</sup>**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Degree	16667	17021	18872	20179	20786	20934	20978
Diploma	17644	15644	16189	16663	16739	15691	15354
Total	34311	32665	35061	36842	37525	36625	36332

Increased completion rates at second level have directly impacted on the number of students entering higher education. In 1996 the numbers participating in higher education in Ireland increased significantly and is estimated at almost 72% of all school leavers now going on to higher education. This represents one of the highest participation rates in the world. This figure is estimated to increase to 82% by 2004 (De Buitléir Report, 1999: 53). This however does not correlate with a recent report from the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which has predicted a 35% drop in Leaving Cert numbers up to 2012 (Flynn, 2004).

This year alone the numbers applying to higher education places have dropped significantly for the first time. The latest figures also contradict a recent Department of Education projection of a 20% increase in higher education numbers. This has now been revised downwards. The new figures in the HEA report and highlighted by the CAO could also unleash much more intense competition between higher education colleges to attract and retain students on their courses (Flynn, 2004).

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from McDonagh, Sean and Patterson, Vivienne (2002) Some Factors affecting the Flow of Students to the Institutes of Technology to 2010, Skills Initiative Unit; The Council of Directors of the Institutes of Technology, p. 18.

### **2. 0. 3. Access to Higher Education**

OECD data indicates that the gap between the participation rate of young adults from low socio-economic groups and the overall participation rate from this group has remained the same if not widened in Ireland (Faculty of Tourism and Food School Based Review, 2002: 34). Clancy and Wall (2000: 63) highlights participation levels in higher education by socio-economic background. In 1998 nearly 100% of the 'higher professional' group participated in higher education attaining a near 'saturation' level having risen from 59% in 1980. At the other end of the socio economic scale 'skilled manual', 'other', 'non-manual' and 'semi-skilled' groups accounted for 34%, 31% and 23% respectively, regarding participation in higher education in 1998.

### **2. 0. 4. Adult Education and Information Technology**

In 1995, over 19% of all new entrants to full time degree level education across OECD countries were aged 26 years or over (OECD, 1997). In Ireland the figure was 2%. The government has set a target of 15% for adult participation in higher education by 2006, (Flynn, 2004). The new figures highlighted in both the CAO and HEA reports would appear to show that the government's efforts to widen access for both mature students and disadvantaged groups have still to make a significant difference, (Flynn, 2004).

The Commission on the Points System Final Report and Recommendations (1999) has made recommendations for all four sectors outlined above on targets to achieve in increasing participation rates in higher education. It is not the purpose of this research to investigate these areas further, but an understanding of them is vital for a foundation to the secondary research.



## **2. 1. Hospitality Management Education**

The Irish hospitality and tourism industry is now one of Ireland's leading growth sectors alongside information technology and financial services (O'Connor, C., 1997). Globally it is responsible for 10.6% of the world's employment, and over the past ten years the industry has created an additional 154 million jobs worldwide (ITIC, 1998 cited in O'Connor, N. 2002). Hotels play a central role in tourism representing the supply of food, drink, leisure and entertainment facilities. Tourism is the second largest industry in Ireland employing in excess of 145,000 people and hotels in Ireland account for 50,000 people in employment (CERT, 2001 cited in O'Connor, N. 2002).

In the academic year 2001/ 2002 approximately 715 students were studying hospitality management at degree level in the Republic of Ireland (O'Connor, N., 2002). These students are enrolled on courses in colleges around the country such as Dublin Institute of Technology, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Athlone Institute of Technology and Shannon College of Hotel Management. It is within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, DIT that this research will take place. This school has a national reputation as one of the leading hospitality and tourism schools in the country with an increasing number of students accepting offers on hospitality and tourism courses within the institute.

The environment in which higher education in Ireland operates is facing a wide range of challenges in the medium to long term. Thornhill (2001), Downer (2001) and Skillbeck (2001) (cited in O'Connor, N., 2002) characterize these challenges under broad headings of major demographic shifts in the populations to 2015, increased diversity in the student body, movement away from reliance on school leavers to fill college places, inclusion of disadvantaged sectors of the population, increased mobility of students and new forms of competition by providers of education.

Not only are demographic changes taking place within the Irish population, as outlined by Flynn, (2004) and McDonnagh and Patterson, (2002) above, but in addition, significant challenges are being imposed on higher education providers to retain as many students as possible within the higher education system. There is considerable evidence from many non-completion studies in the past that retention is a major problem (Costello, 2003; Costello and Russell, 2002; Flanagan, Morgan and Kellaghan, 2000; Morgan, Flanagan and Kellaghan,

2001; Martinez and Munday, 1998; Tinto, 1993). There is a significant loss of students from the higher education system as a result of and with the changes in demographics, and the increase in competition within the hospitality management education providers at institute level there is a need to understand the decision processes of students as they go through their choice of college, progression or eventually dropout so that this can be improved in the future.

Students provide most educational institutions with their reason for being. Without students, colleges would close their doors because they would no longer have clients to receive the classes and other services that the institutions were established to provide (Kotler and Fox, 1995; 393) therefore marketing and attracting students is very important for any institution.

## **2. 2. Students as Consumers**

Decision-making process and choice behaviour may be different for students but the outcome remains with the points system and the CAO forms completed by final year second level students in Ireland. Through the focus group interview I conducted with first year students in the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management in February 2003 it was discovered that most students make rushed and spontaneous decisions when completing their forms based on a number of factors, most of which are related to lack of information from college courses or lack of time to make this very important decision. Some of the courses applied for turn out to be the wrong choice once the students have had time to reflect on their choice over the summer or have unfortunately failed to meet the cut-off point level for their preferred course or have gained more points than they had expected to. This supports earlier research by Costello and Russell (2002). Students can make an initial change but this must be done by May 1<sup>st</sup> each year according to the CAO (website accessed 23/02/04) and a final change no later than July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Costello and Russell (2003) indicated that the student decision-making process at the point of filling in their CAO application forms gave an erratic picture in relation to dropout students. In their study in the Faculty of Tourism and Food, 35 out of the 233 students on their first CAO choice dropped out of their chosen course. After about the fifth choice on the CAO form the attrition performance of students on a course improved but this makes it difficult to interpret if course choice has anything to do with dropout rates and student performances (Costello and Russell, 2003; 4, 31).

The extensiveness of the decision-making process depends not only on prior experience and the extent of personal involvement, but also on the range of available and feasible choices, the decision maker's awareness of these choices (and the information available about them) and the time available for making the decision, among other personal considerations (Kotler and Fox, 1995; 248). Students considering college undertake varying degrees of information gathering, depending on their own level of need for information. Some jump right in and make a decision on what college to go to with very little alternative evaluation, whereas some other students may go to many college open days, seek out college prospectus, and advice from their peers, and they might even want to take a look at the college itself when the course is running.

There are influencers (personnel and peers) on the decision making process of choosing what to study and where to attend, for potential higher education students are often inexperienced individuals still living at home and attending school with neither well-defined choice criteria nor any knowledge of the various offers available. For instance friends can sway the decision (Riggs and Lewis, 1980; Fuller *et al*, 1982; Franklin, 1995), as can parents (Hanson and Litten, 1982; Ball, 1986; Hossler *et al*, 1989; Smith and Bers, 1989; Bouse and Hossler, 1991; Martin and Dixon, 1991; Stanley and Reynolds, 1994; Kalmijn, 1994; Inoue, 1999) or subject teachers (Franklin, 1995; Wasmer *et al*, 1997; Clarke and Brown, 1998) and career guidance teachers (Paulsen, 1990) (cited in Moogan and Baron, 2003; 273). The influence of the student as consumer will be felt when the familiar pattern of the higher education system will start to reconstruct itself into a modular system, where subject disciplines will begin to dissolve and recombine and where the organization of the learning environment (university or institute) will become more fluid as departments lose their hold on the disciplines that gave rise to them (Robertson, 2000; 89). This is in fact what DIT is undergoing at the moment as we reorganise our programs into a modular form of delivery to our students.

### **2. 2. 1. Students and the Decision Making Process**

Parker's study (2002) suggests that many students have applied to college with a very vague idea of what the course was for, and in their first and second year they were still waiting for someone to show them why they were there. When asked, they said they expected their

lecturers to model the discipline for them. Meanwhile in the same study a parallel set of interviews with their teachers revealed the mirror image – complaints were of students who didn't seem to know the basics, who were expected to be shown what to do and why they should do it, students who were so dependent and lacking in motivation that unless they had a task explained to the last detail they could not perform it (Parker, 2002). This is similar to what is taking place in the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management in DIT.

First preference expressed in application forms for entry into higher level is a further influence on the level of commitment by an individual. Johnes (1990; Lowe and Cook, 2003) found a negative relationship between dropout and ranking the institution or university in the students application form. Students who were interviewed through the focus groups in 2003 indicated that this course was not their first choice and they also indicated that they will 'see how it goes'. Other students who had expressed an interest in another course of study have made enquiries into these areas and some have left after exams in first year. But are these dropouts?

University College Dublin have recently reported that 70% of their students who were interviewed in relation to retention studies cited the reason for leaving a course was that it was not their first choice (Oliver, 2003). Costello's study (2003) also suggests that many students who withdraw from DIT are citing wrong course choice as the primary reason. Research to date indicates that many students entering DIT are on the first to third choice, therefore there is another reason for our dropouts and this may be an information gap between what is being offered and students' perceptions of what is being offered.

In such an environment, student decisions on what and how to study will have an amplified impact on the engineering of new curricula, and the marketing of these new learning environments will become more competitive than it already is. The DIT Academic Council decided to go modular in June 2002. The faculty within which I teach after having experienced a school-based review between 2002 and 2003 decided the best decision was to go modular as well. Modularization is where the student gains more choice in their final years of college with a foundation first and second year structure. This will allow the students achieve more autonomy of their learning and it will also give them more freedom of choice when deciding how and what they will focus on learning in their final years. It will also give them more freedom of choice when applying for a college place initially as a lot of the first



year programs within the faculty will be similar for programs of the same level. The real difference will only impact in their second and subsequent years.

In this thesis the student is viewed as a 'consumer' in the educational context as the student travels through a similar process of decision-making and choice behaviour as any consumer. According to Schiffman and Kanuk, (1994), the act of making a decision consists of three basic stages. These have been adapted to illustrate a student decision process at some level within the educational setting.

1. **Need Recognition** - Need recognition occurs when the student is faced with a problem. The student at any level of education may see a need to further their education needs or discontinue their education and find an alternative.
2. **Search for Information** - Before choosing something the search begins when a need is recognized that might be satisfied by the attainment and use of services such as those which a college or university may provide; Brooks (2002) indicates that three main sources of information are mainly used such as social networks (primarily family and friends), educational institutions and their open days, and written information, such as prospectuses and other marketing tools.
3. **Evaluation of Alternatives** - The final stage is where alternatives are evaluated on levels of attributes and criteria specific to the situation and student involved, i.e. which courses or colleges will best satisfy the needs of the student?

The college's image or reputation is important (Bulotaite, 2003; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Milo et al, 1989; Weissman, 1990) because when students are evaluating the different courses and colleges many have said (focus group interview March 2003) that DIT has a good reputation and has been established as the best hospitality and tourism school in the country. This is biased as there are other schools but this is the perception of the students interviewed.

In the past the educational institutions determined what the students wanted. Recently however the students or 'consumers' are being more vocal thus indicating their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the provision of the education sector with student marches to the Dáil etc.

Education establishments are currently converging marketing with their strategic management thinking where they focus on their external stakeholders in the industry, i.e. future employers of the students, and what they want, potential students coming onto courses and what they will be looking for, and competitors to see what they are providing, (Binsardi and Ekwulungo, 2003; 319)

The only thing that may be different within the educational setting is that at the moment the students do not have to pay fees for most full time courses. The future predictions for education in Ireland indicate that fee structures will be reintroduced into the criteria used by students to choose a college course (Walshe, 2004). This will increase the need for marketing strategies in institutions like the DIT to be more effective in the future as competition for fee-paying students heightens. This may be determined by the fact that numbers able to afford to go on to higher education diminishes and the students who can go to college become more determined to make the 'right' choice among all the alternatives available to them at the time and within the field of study they are interested in and are motivated to pursue.

According to Will Priestly, president of the Union of Students in Ireland, the worry of getting into debt, particularly if tuition fees are reintroduced in this country, will have an effect on the types of courses that students choose to study. He believes that if students have to start paying third-level fees there will be a rise in demand for vocational-type courses (Coates, 2004) and an increase in the evaluation process both with pre choice and post choice behaviour. However despite the students' desire and motivation to participate in a certain course the higher education institutions participating in the CAO system retain full control over their admission policies and admissions decisions, (CAO, 2001). Therefore the admissions department and tutors on courses need to be accurate in their choices of students coming on to their courses. In the case of part time courses, interviews of students are still being held but this is not the case with fulltime students and the majority are students selected based on the choices made on their forms and the CAO points.

According to Flynn, (2004) with a significant drop in the numbers applying for college places for the first time in recent years it could also lead to fall in college points for some courses particularly those who have struggled to fill places and who have resorted to accepting all qualified applicants provided they have the minimum entry requirements, usually five passes in the Leaving Cert exam (Flynn, 2004). In relation to the Quality Assurance of courses some

cannot experience a further fall in points. However a fall in points according to Morgan, *et al* (2001) may impact on the attrition rates in colleges. Morgan *et al* (2001) suggests that higher entry points correspond to higher completion rates. In the case of students taking courses with high entry points only 9.2% failed to complete compared with students in courses with low entry points where more than 20% failed to complete. The Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management in the DIT has had low entry points in recent years. With the move from a diploma to an ordinary degree for the hotel and catering management course in the September intake in 2004 this will very likely improve the situation in the points league.

Another stage in the decision making process which is not outlined above is the area of '**Post Enrollment Assessment**'. This is briefly described by Kotler and Fox, (1995; 263) as being the experience the students have after they finally made their college and course choice and have registered with the college. The student may then feel some sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that will influence his or her behaviour while in college or in fact to decide to dropout from higher education. Some students feel they have made the right choice when filling in their CAO application forms in January or February, but by the time their Leaving Certificate examinations are over this certainty begins to fade as they begin to see other options available to them that they did not feel confident about achieving the points in January. However these students may make a final change on their CAO form up to July 1<sup>st</sup>. Or if the certainty remains with the student only because they want to get into college, by the time they do it may not be at all what they expected it to be and they may begin to think about whether or not they have made the right decision or not. Will I stay or will I go? Can I transfer? Will I wait it out until I see if I get my 2<sup>nd</sup> choice on the diploma list or my 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> choice on the degree list? I am sure many questions go through the students minds at this stage in the decision process, but what is nearly certain is, dissatisfaction at this early stage in the students college life may in fact lead to the student dropping out sooner or later down the line or continuing into another related or unrelated field of study to ensure satisfaction occurs. This is the case with the student who I interviewed who has progressed onto the degree course.

Marketing and attracting students is very important for any institution. But retaining registered students is just as important as attracting and enrolling them. The busy or distracted student may reduce their attendance, or decide not to come back to college the following year or they might decide to dropout completely (Kotler and Fox, 1995, 411).

Brennan *et al* (2003) suggests a certain degree of relationship building with the student must take place after entering the college. This may take the form of 'mentoring' or simply being able to answer their queries when approached.

I have looked at how the choice processes throughout the students' college life influence the path they follow, mostly through to their graduation, but in some cases onto further education or dropping out of college. In my research I have illustrated this through cases of students who have left college before completing their course, students who have deferred their next year or are taking a year out, students who have dropped out of another college and who have since transferred into DIT, and students who have progressed onto further education.

In each case I have discovered common influences and factors, which the student experienced during their decision to stay or leave higher education and I have used this research to illustrate how we as educators have to constantly review our courses for delivery in the future, and to adapt our student retention and marketing strategies according to market forces at any moment in time.

### **2. 3. Retention and Progression**

A significant number of students withdraw from the higher education system each year. Each withdrawal or dropout represents for the individual an opportunity reduced, time lost, possible future funding problems and a lowering of morale. For the educational institution, each student who drops out raises questions relating to course information, admission procedures, tutoring and student care (Thomas *et al*, 1996; p. 207).

In response to a possible mismatch of students and courses the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism recently went through a school review where subjects on courses have been modularized and courses themselves are now going to be taught on a semester basis. This is in part response to the needs of the future student and also in response to the McDonagh and Patterson study (2002) to allow the students have a much broader first semester in order to introduce students to the choices that are available and also part of the School's operational strategy. "The School's strategy provides an approach that ensures quality improvement and quality assurance in program design with core modules that offer flexibility and student choice through option and elective modules" (Faculty of Tourism and



Food, School Based Review, February 2003). This will include a more transparent ladder system of qualifications that will allow the student to progress from one level to the next and possibly across similar disciplines if they decide to do so. This also mirrors the attitude of first year diploma students interviewed this year as most aspire to continue onto degree level.

One of the objectives of the DIT outlined in their strategy and policies is to become more student centered and to deliver courses desired by the student of today and the future. DIT also wants to maintain an already established image of providing skillful graduates for industry. In order to be able to do this, all stakeholders in the educational market place must be understood. In particular the student and the process through which the student progresses to make their choice of college and course and thereafter into industry.

*Retention is the process of helping students to meet their needs so they will persist in their education toward the achievement of educational aims they value.*

*Retention can achieve this through the assembling of supports that enable students to be successful and the lowering or elimination of those factors that can disrupt the students' education and that can ultimately result in their failure to achieve these educational aims they want.*

(Moxley, Anwar and Dumbigue, 2001; 37).

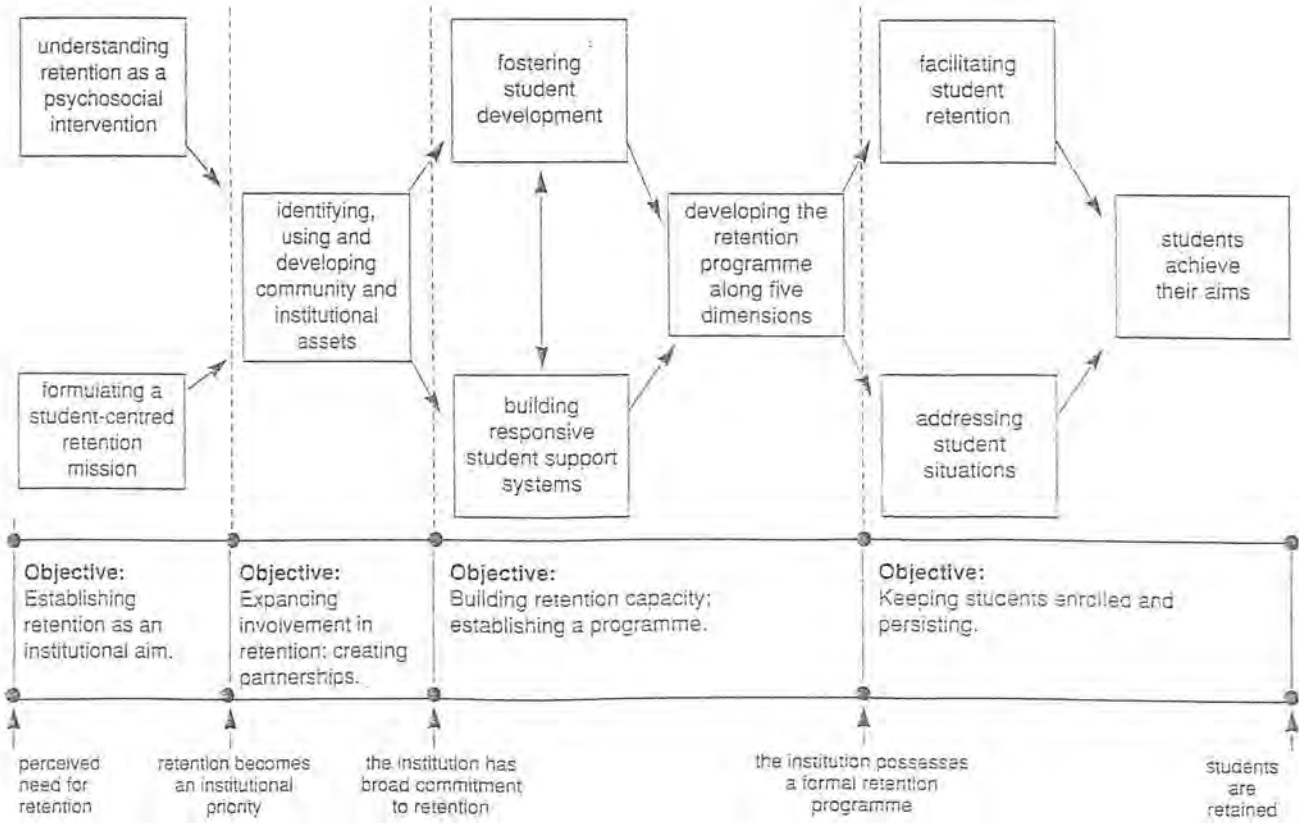
Many problems lie in the area of finances, disability, illness or simple lack of motivation or challenge for the student. However, a lot of non-completion is preventable with the proper utilization of support networks and training of staff and administration to help deal with the situations, and is the responsibility of the college to help retain their students (Yorke, 1999). A simple diagram of a pathway to retention is illustrated below and concerns all elements of a successful retention program. It has been adapted from Moxley, Anwar and Dumbigue, 2001: 20. It is concerned with the following objectives:

- The institution's perception of a need for a retention program – This in DIT is an ongoing process and a process, which is conducted through the Retention Office, and also through the induction committee in the Faculty of Tourism and Food. (See appendix A for the transcript of my interview with Mr. Gerry Dunne, Induction Coordinator, and appendix A (i) for the outline of 2002 through to 2003 induction programs).
- The institution establishes retention as an institutional aim – Part of the DIT strategy as outlined in Costello's 2003 study on the attrition rates in DIT indicates that it is a

central part of our overall strategy in DIT. Part of the DIT strategic plan, *A Vision for Development 2001 – 2015* outlines that the institute embraces a ‘supportive and caring ethos’ and provides ‘retention support for students’.

- The institution establishes partners in the wider community to contribute to a successful retention program – this is done in the Faculty of Tourism and Food where over the years partners within industry have been established and members of the hotel and catering community are invited into the faculty as guest speakers etc. Also members of the induction committee include the chaplain, student counsellor and the student union to gain a wider understanding of what a new student needs when they arrive in college for the first time.
- The institution builds a retention capacity and establishes a formal program for keeping students in higher education – this is also outlined in DIT’s strategic development plan where it indicates it wants to ‘develop an appropriate and effective mentor system’. (Costello, 2003)

**Figure 2. 1: Pathway to Retention adapted from Moxley, Anwar & Dumbrigue, 2001: 20**



Moxley, Anwar and Dumbrigue, (2001; 26-27) also identify five forms of supportive retention practices to help retain students in higher education. I have related these to what DIT has implemented as part of their retention program in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism.

**Table 2. 2: Five Forms of Supportive Retention Practices adapted from Moxley, Anwar and Dumbrigue, 2001; 26-27**

5 Forms of Supportive Retention Practices	What DIT does:
<b>1. Emotional Support and Sustenance –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizes anxiety in students when entering higher education</li> <li>Anticipates stress in new students and helps reduce this stress</li> <li>Staff offer sympathetic advice and support to help students</li> <li>Institution establishes a warm and supportive atmosphere</li> </ul>	Induction committee of tutors, career guidance, chaplain, counsellor, staff, and retention officer, organize the induction at the beginning of the term, and plan to introduce further stages of induction throughout the first and second terms, to cover these issues (see also appendix A where an induction program is outlined)
<b>2. Informational Support –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The program recognizes that most students may not realize the demands put upon them entering higher education</li> <li>Students get the information they need</li> <li>Students meet other students who have been successful in higher education who can give them advice</li> </ul>	All of this is covered in the induction days and through the student services support network made aware to them in their first week; It is also provided in Open Days and information provided in the college prospectus or through tutors and administration personnel
<b>3. Instrumental Support –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students can get practical assistance</li> <li>Students get help in the areas of financial, accommodation, health, stress and transport</li> <li>Students get practical technical assistance in persisting in higher education</li> </ul>	Student counsellor in situ in Cathal Brugha Street helps students with this but they also have the tutor of the course and year tutors
<b>4. Material Support –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial assistance</li> <li>Loan arrangements</li> <li>Emergency loans</li> </ul>	Financial assistance and budget advice is given through the student services office
<b>5. Identity Support –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Valuing of diversity and cultural affiliation</li> <li>Mutual support groups</li> <li>Opportunity to express identity through social and cultural activities</li> <li>Provision of self help opportunities</li> </ul>	These are all covered through the student services office and students setting up their own societies with the aid of the student union

## **2. 4. Transition from Second Level to Higher Education**

Going to higher education is a challenging time for most students and for many it is an intimidating leap into the unknown (McInnis *et al*, 1995; Lowe and Cook, 2003). The shift from the controlled environment of school or college and family to an environment in which students are expected to accept personal responsibility for both academic and social aspects of their lives will create anxiety and distress. Some students will eventually cope simply by avoiding the challenge (Rickinson and Rutherford, 1995) and when students fail to make this transition from one institution or level in their lives to another the result is usually dropping out or underachievement. Healy *et al* (1999) suggest that it is a combination of social, personal and institutional factors that contribute to early leaving.

Many students enter higher education with little or no preparation, not knowing what to expect and how it can change their lives dramatically. In practice many students literally wait and see what happens throughout the progress of the year but are ill prepared for some events (Lowe and Cooke, 2003; Costello, 2003). Johnston (1994) suggests that dropout statistics are far less important than the reasons behind the general lack of interest in college work that is associated with the detachment from the educational and social life associated with college. A considerable proportion of those who complete their studies may have under-performed since, like some non-completers, they too may have been poorly prepared for university life and found managing the transition an obstacle to personal fulfillment (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998).

It is those students who struggle quietly with the changes involved in entering higher education who present the biggest and most subtle challenge for higher education. As these are students who may at any time drift away into the background and before anyone realizes it is too late as they have left. This is where the college or institution has an obligation to enable their transition into higher education, ensure it is a smooth transition and one way DIT tries to be successful in this area is the use of induction or orientation days immediately after the student registers on a course. Despite various initiatives supporting the transition to college, some students start courses without fully understanding what is entailed. There is often pressure on administration staff in September and the availability of initial guidance at this time can be limited especially for part time students (Martinez and Munday, 1998).



This is where induction programs try to fill the gap from second level to the higher levels of education orientating students into the systems, cultures and traditions of educational institutions.

#### **2. 4. 1. Induction**

Induction is sometimes the first tangible contact that undergraduates have with the university or college, if they have not attended ‘Open Days’, and forms their impressions. Induction literally means ‘lead in’ and in many ways to succeed in their studies students must be motivated, accustomed to the college or university culture and feel part of the community (Edward, 2003).

The cultural aspects of the higher education organizations are often overlooked or taken for granted by academic staff, such as the formal lecture, and study skills, study time, note taking, time-management, financial management and budgeting, team work or project work and IT (information technology) skills, and it is assumed that these will ‘happen’ over time (Lowe and Cook, 2003). For the new student entering the academy such practices can seem alien and unsettling especially for those who lack prior knowledge of higher education culture through the related experiences of friends and family. Leathwood’s study (2001) also outlined that for many students their encounter with new styles of learning and teaching, such as independent learning and lack of supervision from lecturers came as a shock. Lack of familiarity with academic culture and the effect of the unequal power relation between lecturer and student, can work to increase students’ conceptions of isolation and alienation, (Read *et al*, 2003). New curricula, the process of adjustment to the new context and anxiety about the transition have also been factors of student dropout (Hargreaves *et al*; 1996).

Formal induction can help where these skills are highlighted as an important part of coming to terms with college life and providing supports where if the student needs it they can go and gain more instruction or support. Also a team-building event for a cohort or induction day is also important. The induction process can cover items such as the opportunity to blend group formation, information giving, hands-on activities, initial assessment and some early work on study skills and course work (Martinez and Munday, 1998; 86). Group cohesion is recognized as an important factor in student retention and effective social and working

relationships need to be fostered. Students seem to appreciate induction exercises which contribute to team building particularly where they have clear objectives and provide feedback on individual and group performance (Martinez and Munday, 1998; 87). Unfortunately, a lot of students make a hurried decision straight after their college induction (if provided) and subsequently leave college. This is because their transition from one educational environment to another can be for some students a daunting experience. This has been part of the problem with the retention of students in the past (Costello and Russell, 2001; 13).

Tinto's (1993) model of student departure has been widely applied to student withdrawal and the transition between schools to higher education and was a reference for this study (see appendix B). It highlights the fact that only positive performance, motivation and commitment and negative departure decisions lead to progression and completion whereas academic failure (Edward, 2003) and anxieties of being under-prepared for the course or unsuited for the course may lead to termination (Billing, *N. D.*). Students need support of some form or another when they arrive in a college but this support network must remain visible and obvious to the student throughout their time in college. When the student arrives at a crossroads in their college life when they ask themselves 'should I stay or should I go', it might be easier or better to discuss their options before they leave rather than asking ourselves afterwards why they have left.

#### **2. 4. 2. Supports**

Owen (2002) suggests that the support given to a student is a priority and that they need to have a reliable and open support network in place to deal with the issues students are faced with in colleges and universities today. Many issues such as prior educational attainment, finance, part time work, institutional services and facilities, information guidance and support in addition to the labour market and policy issues impact on student non-completion. (Tinto, 1987 and 1993; Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1997; Costello and Russell, 2003) Also, and in specific relation to the study conducted in the Faculty of Tourism and Food, it was felt that even with these considerations, a number of students enrolling in colleges lacked a competency in numerical and technical based subjects which would increase the stress of surviving through their first year (Finnegan *et al*, 2000; Costello and Russell, 2001; Costello and Russell, 2003; 3).

The Heist Research (Roberts and Higgins, 1992: 95) found that finances came top of the list of problems faced by students in higher education, with 71% stating that finances were the most severe problem encountered. In Ireland there have been increases over the last two to three years of student marches to the Department of Education and the Dáil sittings protesting against the reintroduction of college and university fees and, what they refer to as, the “terrible grant packages” that they can get. Financial pressures can be considerable and can be a factor as to why students leave their college course. A survey by the Union of Students of Ireland (USI) found that an average student living a “fairly miserable” life spends almost €700 a month on the basics such as accommodation, food, phone, course materials, medical expenses and socializing (Coates, 2004). Many students then have to work part time to finance their studies. More often this part time job might be the reason for students leaving college early as they needed to support themselves and then ended up going into full time employment instead of full time education.

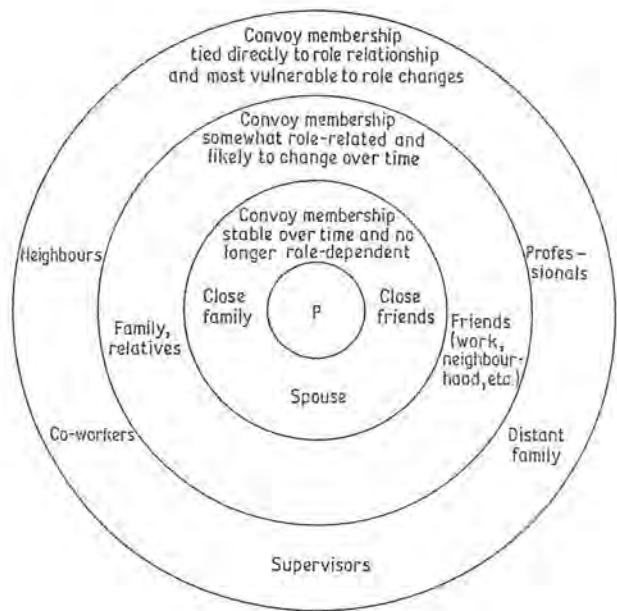
Whilst some studies have shown that financial constraints have been found to have a major impact, both on higher education entry and on the successful completion of degree courses by working class students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, social and cultural factors also have a bearing (Lynch and O’Neill, 1994; Archer and Hutchings, 2000; Read *et al*, 2003). Lynch and O’Riordan’s study of working class students in Ireland showed that over a third of students ‘felt like outsiders due to their class origins’ (1998, p.462). Forsyth and Furlong (2003) supports this view in their study on debt and isolation as factors for dropout rates in higher education in Scotland.

Personal problems also affect both traditional and mature students, male and female, and students from diverse backgrounds, and include such things as difficulties in combining academic work and family responsibilities, illness or death in the family, relationship problems and so on. Students suffering personal problems sometimes require the services of a qualified counsellor in order to help them to deal with the particular problems being experienced (Thomas *et al*, 1996). Sometimes it might be a problem when students do not want to use the facility of the counsellor because of the stigma attached (Owen, 2002) or because they do not want to be seen going in or coming out of the office by others.

Bennett (2003; Saenz *et al*; 1999) also reported on a number of studies carried out mainly in the US that highlighted the importance of established support networks outside of and within the college.

The recognition of the importance of the student union and student services is evident on the induction committee where representatives of the student union, student counseling, and student chaplain and careers office are present. The student union has a facility where students can go and talk about budgeting to someone in the student union, but do all students know this exists? Maybe not if they did not attend the induction day, however the counsellor and careers service is also there to help in this matter. In fact most students may know about the services provided to them and for them but they may be unaware as to how to contact them. This is where the tutoring network steps in.

**Figure 2. 2. Hypothetical Example of a Social Support Convoy adapted from Kahn and Antonucci, 1980 in Sugarman, 1990: 11**



Tutors of courses and years within course are mostly members of lecturing staff on these courses. The support of these members of staff can be a major factor in retention. Tutors who are seen as easily accessible, eager to help and able to make things happen for a student have been viewed as very positive, and where this relationship has been built up to a positive rapport between the student and the tutor personal problems and other issues can be discussed in confidence. Where a more professional support or advice is needed the student can then be referred to this specialist in the highest form of confidentiality necessary.

The tutoring network and support network are also closest to the students and can see if there is a problem before the student approaches them, and in this case it is most obvious in their course work and their academic ability especially as recent reports have indicated (Costello, 2003) in the areas of numeric and technical subjects. Students' academic ability has had a huge influence over the retention of students in the past.

#### **2. 4. 3. Academic Ability**

Students' academic ability is of considerable importance for continuing success in college (Chapman, 1996; Morgan *et al*, 2001; 12). Yorke (1999) indicates that the influences contributing most to inability to cope with the academic demands of a program for students are stress related to the program, difficulty with the program, workload being too heavy, lack of study skills and insufficient academic progress.

Academic ability is probably the single most important determinant of retention and progression, but gender is also an important factor, (Yorke, 1998; Lowe and Cook, 2003). Males are more likely than females to report having more difficulties with aspects of study, commitment etc. However as all of the participants in my study in the case study interviews were female I cannot comment on the issue of gender being a factor of non-completion as some male students had also left the course but did not come forward to participate in the interviews. Out of the first year full time cohort this year ten students have disappeared off the register list before the end of the term, both male and female, but as some of these students have not responded to my enquires to participate in interviews I was not sure that they had left or had just not been attending classes.



Age is another factor, (Power, *et al* 1987; Yorke, 1998; Johnston, 1994; Ozga and Sukhnandan; 1997; Lowe and Cook, 2003). This was supported by an interview on “Liveline” RTE radio 1, on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2003, with ‘Eimear’ a student who dropped out from her course in 2002, who said it was mainly because she was young. She was glad of the year out as she has become more independent in her decision-making and has since decided to go back to college and do a course she is now more interested in participating in since having worked for a year in a related field. In general older students tend to make better choices and be more focused than younger students; however older students are more likely to be affected by family commitments etc. (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1997). Youth and inexperience characterize those students who leave through academic failure (Johnston, 1994; Lowe and Cook, 2003).

There are differences between the intellectual grounding of an incoming student now and what the institute expects. 18 year olds coming into the higher education system are all coming in at different level of maturity. It has been suggested that age should be an irrelevant concept in development psychology, (Sugarman, 1990). However not everyone coming into the higher education system now is coming from second level. There is an increase in the diversity of education over the years and this also needs to be considered when lecturing and facilitating students’ education and learning. Matching of what has been covered in second level and what will be covered in higher education differs from student to student as they may have covered different subjects, or different levels of subjects at second level. Most colleges however will stipulate a certain range of subjects to be present on a students leaving certificate before they can gain entry into certain higher education courses, (CAO, 2004; DIT Full-time Entry Prospectus, 2003-2004).

It was discovered in the Faculty of Tourism and Food that 17% of the first year cohort entered with less than 250 points (all courses i.e. certificate, diploma and degree courses were surveyed) (Costello and Russell, 2003; 3). Study and management skills seem to be part of the fabric in high points students but are certainly lacking in low points students. The change from a second level school style of education with its structured didactic approach to the more open self disciplined and self motivated education style left some of these low points’ students floundering. (Costello and Russell, 2003; 30)



There has been a wholesale move to what Lyotard defined as performativity – towards skills and functional knowledge, a valuing of the demonstrable acquisition of knowledge transmission, rather than that of the process of knowledge creation for its own sake, (Lyotard, 1984; Parker, 2002). Through my focus group interviews both in February 2003 and March 2004 I discovered that all students still on the course expressed the desire for more practical sessions of learning by doing or learning through experience, which they found, were lacking on the first year of their course. One student in particular who has since left the course indicated that purely instructional knowledge was not enough. There is considerable variation in the needs of students and this requires all retention efforts to be personalized to their needs, creating student supports systems that integrate the resources students need to move on in their education successfully, and to remember that retention is a complex personal, social and academic enterprise (Moxley, Anwar and Dumbigue, 2001).

As Morgan *et al* (2001; 67) pointed out 20% of students on courses with low entry points failed to complete but only 9.2% of students failed to complete on courses with high entry points. But we have to understand this study was done in the University sector and they have indicated that the reasons and figures may change in Institutes. However as we strive even further to attain higher ranks within the higher education sector we must understand the reasons for this and other occurrences of student dropout and put plans and policies in place to prevent it from happening. Examples of these plans could be increasing the profile and standard of courses from certificate and diploma with low entry points to other similar qualifications or courses with relatively higher points to both reflect the standard, profile and quality of the courses.

## **2. 5. Conclusion**

The above literature review has investigated the background to higher education and the phenomenon, which are retention, progression and dropout. Student dropout is a multi-causal problem that requires multiple partial solutions (Woodley, 1987; Simpson, 2003). It has illustrated that attrition of students needs a multi-faceted approach if it is to be in any way successful. But it also suggests that a retention strategy must start before the student steps foot inside the college, university or institution, by helping them make clear and well planned decisions of what college course to undertake. This can be helped through the improvement of the marketing of courses to students and improving the literature that students can obtain to assist them in this decision, which usually takes place during the completion of their CAO application forms in January and February each year with a review of these forms up to May 1<sup>st</sup> (CAO, 2004) and one final change on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Given the financial and perhaps emotional costs of leaving home to go into higher education, or commuting long distances or commuting for longer periods of time to attend college, students have to be convinced that being brought into higher education is, of itself, of value. The much cheaper and more convenient alternative is to acquire the prescribed syllabi within a devolved, distributed (i.e. distance) learning system, which complements patterns of life and work, rather than offering a full time package. That is to say that higher education institutions must market their courses as offering far more than the sum of the commodity that is being offered (Parker, 2002).

However it still remains that when some students enter into higher education their post consumption evaluation kicks in and they start assessing the course and institution on whether they are being satisfied or dissatisfied. This can take on many different meanings for many different students, but the students should be facilitated through this process with the induction into college, by the student services and supports offered, through the tutoring network, within the lectures that they will take and also through their own social network within the college.

Tinto (1993) argues that academic and social integration were the two most important factors in the retention of students. Academic integration was said to include academic performance, self-perceptions of how the individual was developing (evidenced by grades achieved) and whether he or she believed that lecturers were personally committed to teaching and helping students. Social integration incorporated self-esteem and the quality of the individual's relationships with fellow students and with lecturing staff (especially informal interactions). Saenz *et al.* (1999) similarly emphasised the importance of regular contacts between students and teachers, the accessibility of staff (and their preparedness to answer students' questions) and the setting of high standards and expectations for student performance in classes. It has also been discovered that a correlation exists between teaching quality as a determinant of student satisfaction and hence of commitment and staying at university (Davies, 2000; Martinez, 2001).

Some students will eventually leave because college life is not what they expected, it is not what they wanted or it is not academically challenging enough for them or on the other hand too academically challenging for them. Where this happens educational institutions must also support these students through their progress out of college, onto other courses or into employment.

As retention of students within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism particularly the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management remains an issue. Is it possible that there has been a gap in the provision of information to students before they come to college or is it the fact that they expect to get something different to what we are providing on the course of choice that leads them to be dissatisfied in their post enrollment assessment? Why do some students leave, what influences them to go? Does this happen straight after induction? Is it because they have financial problems or other personal problems? Could it be that their academic ability does not adapt to higher education or are they simply not able for the workload or increase in independent learning? Where do they go once they leave a course? But if they are undecided about what to do, what do we do to help and what are we trying to do to keep them on their course or in education? In the following chapter these questions and the methods by which the phenomenon of student dropout will be reviewed incorporating the methodology employed and its underlying theoretical perspective.

**Chapter Three: Research Methods and Methodology**

### 3. 0. Introduction to the Research:

*"Research involves systematic, controlled, valid and rigorous establishment of associations and causation that permit the accurate prediction of outcomes under a given set of conditions."* (Kumar, 1999; 16)

Research is the function which uses information to identify and define opportunities and problems, generate, refine and evaluate actions, monitor performance and improve our understandings of issues at hand, (Kumar *et al*, 1999; p.5). Research concerns itself with a quest for knowledge, resulting from a need to enhance a knowledge base and in turn communicate the findings to a target group or society at large. There is no single blueprint for planning research as it is governed by the notion of a 'fitness for purpose' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). Bassey (1999) explains what constitutes educational research, and outlines this as:

*Critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgments and decisions in order to improve educational action.*

Johnson (1994) highlights four key issues while defining what research is. These are:

1. *Research should be focused and not general* – when you being a piece of research you need to set up precise questions to decide exactly what you want to do. These are outlined above in the aims and objectives of the research;
2. *Systematic* – the approach to a problem should be structured and organized – to arrive at the questions above in point number one you would need to know what people have written about retention studies, which would involve collecting information already available. You would then collect your own data and compare it with existing materials. This would be a synthesis of new materials with the old or primary data with secondary data;

Secondary research described by Powers (1990) is information in a publicized form. DIT retention reports, and DIT student numbers have been viewed and were used as a basis for this thesis. In past retention reports it has been highlighted that in the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management 32.4% of the first year cohort withdrew or dropped out before or by the end of the first year (Costello and Russell, 2003; 29). This was the highest dropout rate in the Faculty of Tourism and Food compared to less than 10 students having left from 11 out of 12



of the other courses studied and required a closer look as to why dropout was so high in the Diploma. Primary data is information which is collected for the first time (Chisnall, 2001), and which is carried out in order to back up specific research questions (Buttle, 1986). The nature of the information can be quantitative, which relates to measuring and representing information in a statistical format, or qualitative, which deals with understanding rather than measuring, (Kotler, 1991). Qualitative research is concerned with the 'how' and 'why' rather than the 'how much'.

3. *Beyond generally available knowledge* – carrying out research implies that you add to present knowledge, and maybe generate more research ideas, which need to be resolved and studied further. The retention reports already available led to the idea of investigating those students who leave the course without completing it, generally known as 'dropout' students. Hopefully some of the issues raised within this research will lead to a further investigation in to the alleviation of such problems for future students on the course.
4. *A basis for analysis and elucidatory comments* – after carrying out such research one should be able to arrive at some founded conclusions or at least make recommendations for further research or strategies.

In summary research involves finding out about things, but in a structured way. In this thesis I have reviewed the attrition figures supplied by the retention office in the recent reports on retention of students in DIT, and in particular the Faculty of Tourism and Food, with a particular focus on the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management. This course has in recent years seen a number of students leave the course before completion and I wanted to discover why this was happening.

### **3. 1. Aims:**

The central aim to this research is to investigate if educators in DIT are delivering to our students' expectations. If their expectations are not being met, how can the progression through college be made easier for our students so that they are retained in the college system? The following are some questions I have asked myself about this research:



1. Is there a gap between what we as an educational institute are providing, and what the student expects to get from college? And what about the information gaps between what the students receive pre decision-making and what is provided to them before completing their CAO (Central Applications Office) application form from colleges and career guidance?
2. What are we doing to help retain our students in college or at least to help them onto courses that they would actually like to study? (Progression)
3. Do we know where our students go once they leave a course by their own choice or through progression? What has happened to them? Why did they leave and where did they go?
4. What influences their choice to 'dropout' or progress onto another source of education or employment?

Costello (2003) illustrates through research carried out through the DIT retention office that, 85% of the total number of students failed to complete or withdrew within or during their first year.

### **3. 1. 1. Objectives and Outcomes of the Research:**

1. To provide information to the admissions office within the DIT, especially the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, to enable them to market more effectively to students in the future;
2. To assist the retention office of the DIT with their efforts in the future maintenance of students.
3. To highlight the recurring issues affecting the influence of 'drop-out' students or students who progress onto other education or employment, and to assist students when making this choice.

The Dublin Institute of Technology through its strategic plan, *A Vision for Development 2001 – 2015*, has as one of its seven objectives to embrace a 'supportive and caring ethos' which include in its goals such practical issues as to 'provide retention support for students' and to 'develop an appropriate and effective mentor system.' (Costello, 2003)

### 3. 1. 2. Contribution of the research to the College

Through the focus group interview I have already conducted it was discovered that most students make rushed and spontaneous decisions when completing their forms based on a number of factors, most of which are related to the information from the college courses or the time when these students have to make this very important decision.

When asked what factors were important when selecting the course, students mentioned a lot of things to do with their decision making process prior to the CAO deadlines, such as:

- The lowest points
- The open days
- Career guidance
- 'Opportunities' in the RDS (Royal Dublin Society)
- Other students on the course
- Sounded like a nice course from the book ...(in reference to the CAO handbook)
- The prospectus, like the prospectus is there all right but they don't give you an understanding like what's actually involved, how many projects you do in a year or different things like....
- So I think talking to students or lecturers or something would be better

This would indicate that open days for colleges should be timed around when students need to fill in their CAO forms, which is the case in DIT as the open day for the entire college is on in January. This is the same time the Opportunities fair in the RDS is on. Other students on the course would also seem to be on their list of important factors. However having so little information in the CAO handbook would indicate this student didn't conduct much information research. The prospectus was indicated as being only 'ok' and that it would be better to talk to other students and staff about the course you would like to do.

And then asked why they were on this course students seemed less enthusiastic and said, '*It was the only one I got accepted to!*' Then if they knew why others had left they indicated that it was nothing to do with the actual college itself, it was the fact that they were just uninformed of what the subjects were going to be like... '*some students could have just taken it because it was the only thing they got offered and they didn't want to work...*'

Unfortunately, a lot of students make another hurried decision straight after induction and subsequently leave college. From Costello and Russell's study (2003; 12) 35 students in the Faculty of Tourism and Food withdrew or dropped out from their first choice course which indicates a poor decision making process in selecting courses among these students. There therefore indicates a problem in either the information available to the student or their decision making process (Costello and Russell, 2003; 31).

This could also be because their transition from one educational environment to another can be for some students a daunting experience. This has been part of the problem with the retention of students in the past (Costello and Russell, 2001; 13).

We as educators and providers of courses within education need to try to understand these students and their motives for going to college, for staying in college if not completely satisfied and for leaving a course.

### **3. 2. Methods and Methodology:**

White (2000; 20) suggests that when conducting research the selection of an appropriate methodology and choice of suitable techniques are of paramount importance. It is clear that student surveys, focus groups and interviews are effective in eliciting the complex reasons behind students' education choices to stay in a course, change courses and so on (Robinson, 2004) and this is one of the reasons why the following methodologies have been chosen.

#### **3. 2. 1. Methodologies**

The approach a researcher uses to investigate a subject is termed the 'methodology'; it is the philosophical basis on which the research is founded (White, 2000; 20). Qualitative research takes the view that it is very difficult for researchers to stand back and be objective since they are really part of the process being researched, (White, 2000; 24) as the practice of doing education and finding out about education are inextricably bound together (Scott and Usher, 2000). This is referred to as phenomenalist or interpretivism. Interpretivism contradicts and distinguishes itself from positivism in an attempt to understand and explain human and social reality (Crotty, 1998).

In social research knowledge is concerned not with generalization, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination. To explain the social world we need to understand it, to make sense of it, and hence we need to understand the meanings that *construct and are constructed* (epistemology) by interactive human behaviour. Human action is given meaning by interpretive schemes or frameworks (Scott and Usher, 2000). This paradigm is commonly described as the qualitative approach to research as the phenomenological method adopts a subjective style, in that the researcher and the research or study are linked (Hussey and Hussey, 1997).

An interview is representative of this type of research as the researcher not only aims to acquire information from the subject, but also can observe the interviewees facial expressions and body language, or tone of voice, all of which contribute to the overall experience of the interview and / or observation. Hence the presence of the researcher in this situation is central to the research taking place. As Hussey and Hussey (1997) point out,

*“Researchers have values [which] help to determine what are recognized as facts and the interpretations which are drawn from them, [that is] the researcher is involved in what is being researched.” (1997; 49)*

The interview varies on continua of formality-informality, openness-closedness and flexibility-rigidity. Some interviewing is done according to fixed schedules of questions all of which are asked in exactly the same way in all interviews. (Ball, 1984; 91; Hammersley, 1984 cited in Spiggle, 1994) Unstructured interviews on the other hand are less likely to follow a question and answer session but are more likely to be formed by the basis of a conversation between the researcher and the participant (Kwortnik, 2003; 118). The objective of the depth interview is to obtain rich, detailed data that reflect the informants’ language, experience and perspective “in depth” (Spiggle, 1994). The interview is characterized by the use of general, descriptive questions that facilitate the dialogue, but which let the informant direct and provide the content of the interview and which involves the researcher as interpreter mostly during and after the interview has been conducted (Kwortnik, 2003; 119).

I have considered that the qualitative approaches (outlined below) will give me a holistic view of the student and more personal opinions of the college system as perceived by the student. As the interviews will have to take on a semi-structured approach, as these are individual cases, I can only offer a general area within which to direct my questions, such as college life, classmates, induction procedures, subject material and the college location and facilities.

### **3. 2. 2. Methods**

The particular techniques used to collect data and information is termed 'methods' (White, 2000). Examples of qualitative research methods are action research, case study research and ethnography (Crotty, 1998). Qualitative research resources may include observation, participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, documents, texts and the researchers own experiences, which would support Denzin and Lincolns (1998) observation that qualitative research is:

*"Multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter."* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; 2-3)

For this research I have employed two types of data collection and these are focus group interviews and case study interviews.

#### **1. Focus Group Interviews**

*Focus groups are contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme or topic, where the interaction with the group leads to data and outcomes.* (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001: 288).

Research has been conducted through focus group interviews with full time students on the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management program. This was used as pilot research for this thesis (focus groups 1 and 2 2003) and raised some interesting issues such as timetable workload and lack of integration of some subjects leading to increased workload, the lack of student union involvement in the induction process and lack of study skills provided up to exam time or assessments. They also illustrated some reasons why they are staying, such as the staff are friendly and approachable and the class is fun, and what would influence them to consider leaving, such as not being able to cope with workload or assessments.



I have also conducted a follow up focus group interview with current first years on the program to evaluate if these issues remain the same. This interview took place at the end of February 2004. Focus groups can be used at the preliminary or exploratory stages of a study (Kreuger, 1988); during a study, (Race *et al*, 1994); or after a study has been completed, to assess any other issues arising from the research. The recommended number of people per group is usually six to ten (MacIntosh, 1993) but some researchers have used as few as four (Kitzinger, 1995). In all my focus groups the numbers were never higher than ten or less than four students.

All students from the first year cohort of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management were invited to take part. No individual student was specifically selected nor were certain groups of students singled out. It was simply up to the students if they wanted to take part in this study or not. In this way I was ensuring their interest and motivation to take part in the study but also ensuring their comfort while being interviewed and hopefully their trust. All interviews took place within the college at a time that was agreed to by the student, as this was convenient for both the students and myself. Students were invited to take part in my focus groups and were asked to read the ethics statement and sign an ethics form.

The focus groups that took place last year were only used as pilot research. The first interview took place on February 24<sup>th</sup> 2003 at 2pm in Cathal Brugha Street, room 47. Students from the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management class were invited to take part but only four female students turned up at this hour. The taped interview took 45 minutes in total, excluding introduction to the research, as these students were in class at 3pm. The second interview took place at 3pm on the same day and in the same room. This time six students took part, four female and two male. In fact of the two male students who took part in this interview, one has had to repeat some subjects and is now awaiting his results of the first year exams a year on, and the other student has dropped out and is working in an unrelated industry. Both declined to be interviewed as part of the case studies.

The focus group interview that took place this year, and which was used to support the case study interviews, was conducted in room M2.04 between 4pm and 5pm on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 2004. Again all students from the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management first year cohort were invited to take part and seven female students turned up at the appointed time.



Again these students were given the research ethics statement to read before the interview took place and were also asked to sign their ethics statement declaring that I could use the information they were to give me during the interview. The information that I obtained from this interview was analysed with all the other case study interviews that I had conducted at earlier dates with other individual students.

For all interview occasions I was the moderator. I did not use a questionnaire, as by its nature a focus group is open ended and cannot be entirely predetermined (Gibbs, 1997; May, 2002; 124) but I did use a list of topics that I needed discussed to give the group a focus and direction. For most of the interaction among the focus group interviews I tried to moderate it in such a way that not one student maintained control of the discussion and all students got a chance to voice their opinions, but the freedom and flexibility (May, 2002; 125, 133) of the conversation remained nonetheless.

*Today voice can mean, especially in more participatory forms of research, not only having a real researcher, and a researchers voice in the text, but also letting the research participants speak for themselves. (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; 183)*

As all students wished to remain anonymous, and in consideration that there are still at college, I could not refer to them by name. In the transcripts of these interviews their initials, numbers or a pseudonym refers to these students and interviewees. Some critical incidents of their choice to come to college and different periods during the term in college were referred to to get the discussions going, such as the investigations, if any, they undertook before coming to DIT, their induction process, before and after Christmas etc.

Both in the beginning and after completing the interviews I thanked all participants for taking part and informed them as to the importance of their input and their honest opinions. For the focus group interviews that took place in 2003 I informed the students that the information was going towards the proposal for this research and hence I have used these interviews as pilot research. For the students currently in the 2004 cohorts I have explained that the information is being used as part of the dissertation. Again during all interviews I have asked their permission for this information and also for their permission (see appendix C) to record (via tape) the interview. Some of the tape recording is inaudible due to the noise pollution in the background from traffic etc, but I have also taken notes during this time and have recorded all information as accurately as possible in the form of interview transcripts.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Focus Group Interviews:**

Focus group research is a qualitative research technique used to gain insight and understanding into the nature of a problem, in my case, the reasons students leave a course before completing it. The focus group technique allows the researcher to interact with the respondents and allows opportunities for clarification, follow up questioning and probing of responses. The researcher can also observe non-verbal behaviour that may supplement the verbal responses. Also the synergistic effect of the group may result in richer data that may not have been discovered had the interview been on a one to one basis.

Focus group findings are not survey results; they only permit an insight into issues under study but not for statistical inference. The focus groups conducted through my research are also not statistically representative of all students who may or may not want to leave a course but are representative of the diploma cohort under investigation whose colleagues have left their course.

Focus group interviews can be used either as a method in their own right or as a complement to other methods, especially for triangulation and validity checking (Gibbs, 1997; Morgan, 1988). Through the focus group interviews it was obvious that I also needed to interview those students who chose to leave the course and to investigate what influenced them to leave or to stay as long as some did.

I also needed to investigate if the figures produced by the Retention Office gave a clear picture of 'pure' dropout students or were there some students who simply deferred, progressed or in fact left after completing stage exams. For this I chose to interview a mixture of these students for illustrating different cases of dropouts, deferrals and transfer or progression students.

## 2. Case Study Interviews

Case studies offer the opportunity for a holistic view of a process, as the whole can only be understood by treating it as the central object of study (Gummesson, 2000). As a research endeavor the case study contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social and political phenomena (Patton and Appelbaum, 2003; 63). Hopkins (2002 cited in Robson, 2002) describes case study research as comprehensive overview of an issue that is accurate and representative of the study, usually focusing on the study of single cases (Robson, 2002). As Cohen *et al* (2000) states:

*Case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis. (Cohen et al, 2000)*

The information can be obtained through ethnographic observations, focus group interviews or in-depth, structure or unstructured interviews. I have used case study research by interviewing certain students who have ‘dropped out’ of the first, second or third year cohorts of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management program or who have transferred from this program into others. In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. (Yin, 2003; 1)

Stake (1995: 3) distinguished between intrinsic case study and instrumental case study. I am interested in the instrumental case study research as it is referred to by Stake (1995) and Bassey, (1999) as research into one or more particular situations in order to try to understand an outside concern. Other case study styles have been described by Stenhouse (1985), Sturman (1994), Hammersley (1993), Yin (1993) cited in Bassey (1999). Stake (1995) also asserts that people can learn much that is general from a single case. However using multiple data collection methods such as the focus groups and the case study interviews will provide a stronger substantiation of constructs (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Advantages and disadvantages of case study approaches to research have been adopted from White (2000) and are outline below.

**Advantages of case study approach:**

1. It can be carried out by the single researcher, i.e. the author of the dissertation;
2. It is relatively cheap and not dependent on expensive technology – the most that was required as technology was concerned was a Dictaphone or tape recorder which the author already had;
3. The data may not be present in large amounts but will be interesting and specific to the example under investigation;
4. It takes place in a natural setting and gives the research the reality that can be missing from other forms of research such as questionnaires or surveys – during the interviews the students started out by being a little uncomfortable about the issues being discussed and the fact that they were being recorded, but then slipped into a mood of comfort and ease and became more honest in their opinions as the tape rolled on.

**Disadvantages of case study approaches:**

1. The whole issue of generalization needs to be handled with caution;
2. Case studies can generate a lot of information. In this research there are different individuals being interviewed that may come up with conflicting and individual information that needs to be manually analysed individually.

Case studies can produce some very interesting material and should be handled with care considering there are a lot of different opinions and sometimes very similar opinions being voiced. Yin (2003; 57), states that case study research is among the hardest types of research to do because of the absence of routine formulas. However, this can be handled extremely well during the interview.

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. The interviews are more guided conversations than structured queries (Yin, 2003; 89). Although a consistent line of inquiry is pursued, the actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). The point is that case study data collection is not merely a matter of recording data in a mechanical fashion, as it is in some other types of



research. You also must be able to interpret the information as it is being collected and to know immediately if several sources of information contradict one another and lead to the need for additional evidence, like a good detective, and then you must make inferences about what actually transpired (Yin, 2003; 61).

The interviewees chosen for this element of the research were simply all those students who had left the course. Initially I was looking at all three years of the full and part time Diploma course and had visited all classes to talk to students about my research, but then had to rely on the first year cohort of the diploma course as no students came forward for interviews. Only one student who had left the part time course approached me after hearing about my research from a classmate of hers, and another first year student came to me to be interviewed the day she left college. One other student who had deferred but who has since left the college due to administration and financial reasons had known of my study when in college and then came in to talk to me when she had decided to leave. To begin with this only gave me three interviews, which I did not think was enough.

After weeks of looking for students who had left the course I then resorted to asking the class reps of the first year course to approach these students for me, as I was not getting much response from my enquiries. After a week the class rep gave me two phone numbers and said the interviewees were working and would like to be part of the research but found it difficult to get in to the college to do the interviews. It was then agreed with the two participants that I would conduct the interview over the phone. The class rep also indicated that the other students who had left or had been missing from class did not want to participate.

This was okay as I had now five interviews and a possible two others as I had approached two students who had spoken to me before of their feelings of dropping out from a course but who I had yet to interview. One student had been in the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management and has since progressed onto a degree and the other student had dropped out of a course to transfer into the diploma.

In all cases I wanted the interviewees to either approach me themselves or at least feel comfortable about the research before I interviewed them as I know that sometimes students feel there is an element of 'failure' attached to dropping out and I did not want any of the

interviewees to feel this way. Therefore I feel that recruiting the class reps assistance in tracking down these students was a positive and ethical element to the research.

Robson (2002) outlines particular circumstances in which interviews are appropriate:

- Where the study focuses on the meaning of particular phenomena to the participants – how students decide what and how to learn, when and where they will learn;
- Where individual perceptions of processes within a social unit are to be studied prospectively;
- Where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed – discussions under focus group interviews will highlight how first year students came to choose the course they are in today;
- Where exploratory work is required before a quantitative study can be carried out;
- Where a quantitative study has been carried out and qualitative data is required to validate particular measures or to clarify the meaning of the findings – the focus group interviews led me to try to discover why students ‘drop-out’ or progress onto other forms of education or employment and the review of the retention reports in the past led me to ask the question ‘why’ do they leave from this particular course.

As can be seen from the above review of methods employed in this research I have chosen to triangulate the study by utilizing three sources of evidence for the research, i.e. archival records (retention reports and other literature), focus group interviews of students on the course and individual interviews with those students who have left or transferred from or into the course for numerous reasons. In each of the methods employed ethical considerations in retrieving the information were also used (see my research ethics statement in appendix D). The rationale for using multiple sources of evidence, i.e. triangulation, has been highlighted as a major strength of case study data collection (Yin, 2003; 14, 97). In this research both data and methodological triangulation have been attempted (Yin, 2003; 99).



### 3. 3. Theoretical Perspective – Interpretivism/ Phenomenology

As the method and methodologies above suggest, a predominantly qualitative approach is required for the research. As researchers we bring with us assumptions to our methodologies and we need to explain these, especially our philosophical stance behind the chosen methodologies (Crotty, 1998). The underpinning theoretical perspective informing this research is the interpretivist/ phenomenological paradigm.

*“Interpretivism was conceived in reaction to the effort to develop a natural science of the social. Its foil was largely logical empiricist methodology and the bid to apply that framework to human enquiry.” (Schwandt, 1994; 125 in Crotty, 1998; 67)*

In social research, knowledge is concerned not with generalization, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination. To explain the social world we need to understand it, to make sense of it, and hence we need to understand the meanings that *construct and are constructed* (epistemology) by interactive human behaviour. Human action is given meaning by interpretive schemes or frameworks (Scott and Usher, 2000).

Interpretivism is often linked to the thought of Max Weber (1864-1920) who suggests that in the human sciences we are concerned with what Weber calls ‘Verstehen’ or understanding. The phenomenological paradigm represents the approach to the research process as carried out in the study of aspects of social science research, and is particularly concerned with understanding human behaviour. This paradigm is commonly described as the qualitative approach to research as the phenomenological method adopts a subjective style, in that the researcher and the research or study are linked (Hussey and Hussey, 1997).

The research carried out under the phenomenological paradigm tends to involve a lengthy time span in order for the desired findings to be realized, during which time, for example, patterns may emerge or may be observed. The idea for this research originated during the School Review process during 2001- 2002, and the initial focus group interviews took place during February 2003. Further focus groups took place in February 2004 to support the case study interviews that were conducted between December and February 2004. This fulfilled the longitudinal time span of the phenomenological paradigm, however further research would be advised.

Phenomenology is also considered a reflective enterprise, and in its reflection it is critical (Larrabee, 1990; 201 in Crotty, 1998; 82). My interviews fulfill this perspective, as I enquired after the factors influencing students' choice to 'dropout' from or progression in education, which is a reflective process for them. They were 'reinterpreting' their journey.

### **3. 4. Methods of Research Analysis**

The analysis of my data took place throughout the study, as it was an iterative and persistent part of the research process. Throughout all the interviews that took place for this research I was constantly 'reading' the situation, the location, the seating arrangement and the body language of both myself and the participants to detect any occurrences of feelings that may not have been voiced or situations where the participants may be saying what their colleagues may like to hear or what I may or may not want to hear. I established an element of comfort for the participants by approaching the class rep to contact the students who had dropped out. Then, once they had agreed, to contact them myself. Here an element of trust was being built up between the respondents and myself.

I was aware that my 'other' relationship with these participants, i.e. that of them being student and me being their lecturer or a lecturer in the college, that they may have withheld some information or glossed over some of the more important issues relating to student dropout or withdrawal from a course. However at all times I tried to maintain a voice for the participants and myself within the research and therefore the analysis will take the form of literal reading and interpretation and 'pattern matching' and 'explanation building' using the voices of the interviewees as suggested by Yin (2003; 116).

This is further clarified in the research ethics outlined below, the ethics statement given to each participant and chapter four where the initial analysis and interpretation is explained.

### 3. 5. Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research conducted in natural settings is common in the field of education, however negotiation of access and the terms under which a researcher will be able to work with participants can be difficult to arrange (Jarzabkowski, 2001). Surprisingly it has only been recently that concerns about the ethics of research have strongly influenced psychologists (Benson, 2002; 166). Ethics is all about how we live in relation to one another and our moral obligations not to misuse or misinterpret to our best ability any information or assistance that would be given to us when conducting research.

In relation to educational research ethics refers to the search for rules of conduct that enable us to operate defensibly in the political contexts in which we have to conduct educational research (Simons, 1995; 436; Pring 2000; 140; Punch, 2002). Ethical problems emerge in all methodologies, although much of the discussion of ethics in educational research is focused on the interpretive, critical and feminist paradigms (Busher, 2002: 81).

Robson (2002) reproduces the guidelines on ethical principles for conducting research with human participants from the British Psychological Society, and the guidelines on anti-sexist language from the British Sociological Association, as well as summarizing the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (1982 cited in Sarantakos, 1988) about ethical principles.

The following guidelines on ethical principles in education research have been adapted from McNiff et al (1996).

1. Negotiate Access:

- With Authorities – this has already been achieved through discussions with my Head of Department and the tutors of the full and part time Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management (see appendix F);
- With Participants - All students were asked to sign an ethics document (see appendix C) where it first asks for their permission to conduct this survey with them as participants. The research was also explained to them fully and they could choose to be a part of the research or not. *Researchers should explain their work as fully as possible to sponsors, facilitators and subjects in ways that are likely to be meaningful to them* (British Sociological Association, 1982; Katz, 1996)



## 2. Promise Confidentiality

- Confidentiality of Information – The signed ethical statement also states the author will not exploit any of those being interviewed or misuse any of the information obtained from them without their permission. *No information is valuable enough to obtain by nipping away at personal liberty, and that is true no matter who is doing the gnawing* (<http://trapdoor.glos.ac.uk/ess/soss/ethics>).
- Confidentiality of Identity – The ethical statement also explains that everything remains anonymous (see appendix D).
- Confidentiality of Data – Referencing will indicate data that is used by the research that is not originally by the author. Also, this research will remain the property of the author until it is published.

## 3. Ensure Participants' Right to Withdraw from the Research:

- It has already been outlined to the participants of my research that they were allowed to withdraw whenever they wanted – relationship of student/ lecturer has been considered and with all of the individuals/ students in question, none are presently students of mine so there is an element of impartiality.

## 4. Keep Others Informed:

- Members of the retention office and members of the faculty have given their assistance in developing this research, but it is not envisaged that any more information will be divulged until the thesis is published.

## 5. Keep Good Faith:

- Everything that was conducted through this research was discussed with those involved and nothing will happen without their permission. Everything that will be reported will be truthful and to the authors best ability, anonymous and valid, and using proper citation and referencing.

Educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research (McNamee and Bridges, 2002; 251). Also we must always remember that there is no one rule on earth without exceptions (Small, 2002; 96) in the end it is everyone's responsibility to ensure that educational research is ethical research and the better prepared we are to address this task the better our research will be (Small, 2002; 109).

### **3. 5. 1. Reliability, Validity and Integrity of the Study**

It is also important to understand the relationship that exists between the researchers and researched and the roles, status, power within the relationship (Edwards, 1993; 162). As I was a lecturer to many of the students who left or transferred into other courses I was aware of my power over the students and the influence this might have in getting their co-operation with my research or which might be more likely not getting any co-operation. For this reason I enlisted the help of the class rep of the first year Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management to approach the students, who had dropped out, for me and brief them about my study. The choice was then theirs if they wanted to become part of it or not.

The second stage was after getting their phone numbers from the class rep after they had agreed to be part of my study I made my first contact with them to conduct the interview. They had the choice to do the interview with me in the college, in my office or at a location they choose or over the phone. Two chose to do the interview over the phone while others chose to come into college to my office to do their interviews. They indicated that they had the chance to catch up with their friends when they did this, which I can assume made them feel more comfortable about the whole scenario. As was already indicated through the ethics section, these students could still pull out of the study if they felt uneasy about the questions being asked but I found that they were all very enthusiastic about their part in the study.

I had also indicated to them that they were to be as honest with me as they could and that they could be assured of their confidentiality. I also gained their trust as they had already been approached in the first place, not by me their lecturer, but by one of their old friends from college. I also assured them that their voice would be heard through the research and I would not alter any of their responses and that their language remained as they used it. They all received my research ethics statement with the transcripts of the interviews afterwards so that they could review what was said and indicate to me if there was anything omitted. This ensured respondent validation as outlined by Lacey and Luff (2001). Throughout the research I attempted to employ these simple methods of reliability, validity and integrity. As my research is one of critical qualitative approach the essence of traditional validity has to be questioned as Bassey (1999) advocates trustworthiness. Some analysts argue that validity may be inappropriate term in critical research context, as it simply reflects a concern for acceptance within a positivist concept of research. Trustworthiness is a more appropriate word in the context of critical research and my research.



### 3. 6. Delimitations

Although it has proven that this research is taking form through the literature review and the focus group interviews that I have already conducted, it was proving very difficult to find or to locate students who have dropped out of college. I have since been able to locate ex-students who were interested in taking part in the research and agreed times to conduct these interviews.

Another problem I have faced was when I was talking to the admissions office they informed me that a lot of students who leave third level education do so without official notification, and there is no real effective tracking system for students who leave this way. There should be some form of tracking of students. The lack of regular attendance roll calls does not help with giving an early warning of a student at risk of leaving.

The system retains student details although some students may have left in September or early October. However, since the introduction of the Banner system, this tracking has improved if only marginally according to Maurice Boland, (Admissions Registrar, Cathal Brugha Street). Some of the contact addresses and other information, which has been provided to me by the admissions office, have in fact turned out to be out of date already and who knows where these students are now. They might even be in Australia taking a year out which may simply mean they have deferred and expect to return to college in the future!

Another limitation of the research is the fact that the research is predominantly qualitative and not quantitative in nature and takes time to analyze. The fact that not many students who dropped out of the college could be located or were willing to come in for an interview has left me with five dropout interviews, another interview with a student who has transferred into the program and one with a student who has progressed onto a degree having at one time wanted to leave the course. This is not much information to go on but enough as it is more than one student's opinion, which could bias the research entirely. I have also conducted a follow up focus group interview with present students to compare and contrast with the case study interview findings.

### **3. 7. Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the research methods and methodologies employed in this study. It has outlined for the reader the reasons for the study and the aims and objectives of conducting such a study. A brief outline of the two principal research methods were also given having already illustrated during the literature chapter an outline of previous retention reports and other documentation which influenced me to conduct this research in the first place.

During any research or study on individuals where the relationship between the researched and the researcher is different from its normal relationship, elements of ethical considerations must be employed as the respect for persons involved in this research should be present at all times. During this research there were times when I thought I may not get anyone for my study and the amount of delimitations to the study seemed to outweigh the research itself. This did not last long as after the Christmas term other avenues of research and investigative interviews presented themselves to me in the form of the focus groups with the present first years and other interviews with students in the college and who have left.

A total of three focus group interviews with first year diploma students still on the course were carried out, two as pilot research last year and one as closure this year, in conjunction with five case study interviews (two were telephone interviews) with students who have dropped out of the diploma course, one interview with a student who has transferred into the course, and one interview with a student who wanted to dropout last year but has since progressed with higher education and has since gone on to do a degree.

Finally an interview was conducted with the lecturer in charge of coordinating the induction process of the diploma students, to get a clearer picture of what they are presented with as they enter the college for the first time (see appendix A). This induction period has been indicated by most of the interviewees and previous retention reports (Costello, 2003) as an important time when the initial decision to stay or go has arisen or been decided. These interviews took place between February 2003 and March 2004 and an analysis of these interviews is reviewed in the following chapters.

**Chapter Four: Research Analysis**

## 4. 0. Introduction

According to Villella (1986: 221) the ambiguousness of student dropout is reflected in the fact that such behaviour is often the result of a complex network of interactions between the student and the institution, such that withdrawing from an institution is an individualised form of behaviour that it may never be possible to truly know why students leave. However the Thomas *et al* (1996) study provided a baseline of factors from which to draw and direct the interviews. The study showed that a number of factors were at play such as personal, financial, the course itself, employment, student supports, the institution etc. (Thomas *et al*, 1996; 215). It is clear therefore that the causes of student dropout are many and varied and that it is often a combination of factors, which lead students to withdraw from an institution.

Even in a small college or a faculty in a large college the task of understanding the reasons for persistence or dropout is daunting (Martinez and Munday, 1998; 75). This is one of the reasons why I chose to concentrate on only one course in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism. I also chose to concentrate on this course, the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, as it has proven in recent years to have a relatively high dropout rate of 32.4% (Costello and Russell, 2003; 29). Sometimes even the attempts at contacting students who have left or who are on the point of dropping out have proven to be very difficult in arriving at any response rate that would provide the evidence that institutions and colleges are looking for to enable them make proper retention strategies for the future. I have attempted to contact students who have dropped out of college over the past two years but have only been successful in talking to a few students from this year's cohort.

Research studies have proven that students who dropout tend to identify largely external reasons such as lack of motivation, poverty, health, conflicting demands of part-time work etc. (Martinez, 1995; Martinez and Munday 1998; Davies, 2000; Costello, 2003). Also students who are contacted tend to brush over the real reasons for leaving hence giving responses that they assume researchers want to hear and therefore skewing the research (Martinez and Munday, 1998). Will this be obvious to the researcher or will it ever become evident? This may only happen if the research was to be a longitudinal study. This research was conducted in a time frame of a little over twelve months, with the individual interviews taking place between December 2003 and March 2004, so this may need further interviews to discover if biased responses were given or not.

This is one of the reasons why I chose to conduct focus group interviews with current students still on the program to be able to further analyse the reasons they would give for students leaving a course, or the reasons they would give if they ever thought of leaving a course. I wanted to then compare these findings with current or past research into the reasons why students dropout from courses (for example Martinez and Munday, 1998; Martinez 2001; Davies, 2000; Costello and Russell 2001; Costello, 2003). This will therefore provide me with triangulation of results I outlined in chapter three on research methods and methodologies.

I have adapted an outline presented by Martinez and Munday (1998) in their FEDA (Further Education Development Agency) report to analyse my results from all interviews compiled. I will also compare and contrast these findings to help provide answers to the research questions posed which follows the stages in qualitative analysis outlined below.

#### **4. 1. Stages in Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis is a very time consuming and demanding process (Lacey and Luff, 2001). The majority of qualitative research will take the process of the following, some being repeated over and over to make sense to the researcher. The following procedures adapted from 'Dissertation Skills for Business and Management Students' are suggested for analysing qualitative data:

- Read through all the result formats, e.g. interview transcripts, field notes etc. As you work through note down any points and ideas that are identified;
- Read through the notes and transcripts a second time but this time noting the ideas that are significant to each interview and in relation to the research question. Give each theme/word/piece of discourse a code or colourings for identification after all transcripts have been re-read.
- Additional themes can be added, as the transcripts are re-read again. Sometimes transcripts are cut up at this stage and bundles of the same code or colouring are left in separate piles. If this is being carried out each piece of transcript needs to be coded so as not to lose track of from whom the piece of discourse originated.



- Finally when all results have been assigned to a particular code or colouring the transcripts and their codes need to be re-read again to make the final interpretation and analysis of the data in relation to the original research question.

Interview analysis adapted from Lacey and Luff (2001; 16-21) also suggests the following:

1. **Transcription** – this may take at least four times as long as the length of the interview, maybe even longer. Fluency or language used by the interviewee must be left as said on tape or within the notes taken during the interview as this adds to realism and credibility of your data as well as giving clues as to how the respondent was feeling. Record laughter, body language and other environmental factors that may have influenced your interviewee's responses. All transcripts were completed within a few days if not hours of the interview-taking place when memories, thoughts or ideas about the interview were still fresh in my mind. All of these transcripts are located in the appendices.
2. **Organising your Data** – Once interviews have been transcribed the interviewees must be assigned code numbers or pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality if this had been agreed at the outset. Names and other identifiable materials should be removed from the transcripts. Narrative data needs to be numbered using line or paragraph numbers so that any unit of text can be traced back to its original context. The names of the interviewees were omitted from the transcripts at the outset. In the case of the focus group interview signed consent forms were submitted which records each interviewee's name and class. In the instance of the case study interviews it is recorded on tape who the interviewee is and also a brief outline of what my research is about. During the analysis stage of the research it was recognised how important numbering the paragraphs was as I kept returning again and again to data to understand, analyse and interpret it, sometimes the same paragraph over and over.
3. **Familiarisation** – This occurs once the interviews begin. Listening to the interviewees, recording the interview, transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the transcripts, making notes and finally analysing all these notes and transcripts, make this data familiar to the researcher. I decided to transcribe all the interviews myself although I had been advised by others to pay someone to transcribe and summarise the

data for me. I'm glad I didn't as the data is extremely familiar now and when I return to a transcript I can even picture in my mind the interview, the setting, the interviewee, their body language etc. I know this would become more difficult if the number of interviews was to increase, but then computerised analysis would be employed. I decided it required a manual hands on approach as my interview sample was going to be small.

4. **Coding** – Framework analysis suggests that codes can be derived from existing literature, and in this research the codes of analysis could be divided up by looking for the following words or inferences to factors influencing dropout such as personal, financial, the course itself, employment, student supports, the institution etc. (Thomas *et al*, 1996; 215; Costello, 2003). This was conducted manually throughout because of the number of interviews were few (Basil, 2003). The 'word' search that indicates how many times a word is mentioned or if a word is mentioned was used at the beginning but it did not give the context within which that word was used. Therefore the transcripts were read with highlighter pens and then when coding was being refined with the computer highlighter.
5. **Themes** – With the framework analysis approach, it would be likely that some of the themes emerging from the data from the above codes. Themes started to emerge that were consistent amongst all interviews but not only that, some were in agreement with previous research whereas others disagreed with it totally.

The above outline is similar to analysis and interpretation of results and findings outlined by Sarantakos (1988). I will also bear in mind analysis and interpretation of qualitative data outlined by LeCompte, Preissle and Tesch (2003) where they suggest literal reading and re-reading the data as often as you can to search for regularities and emerging patterns among the data, then linking these patterns from the interviews to the original research questions, through the voices of the participants and the researcher. The interpretation of this data and the subsequent analysis and findings should also be related to existing theory and knowledge. Yin (2003; 116) refers to this as 'pattern matching' and 'explanation building' in case study analysis.

As I am adapting this style of analysis I have decided to split the transcripts into the following categories outlined in this chapter and do a further interpretation and analysis of these findings in relation to the original research question in the following chapter, chapter five.

## **4. 2. Pre-entry, Guidance and Admission Procedures: Findings from the Research**

Reasons for student dropout from previous research (Martinez, 2001; Martinez and Munday, 1998; Costello and Russell, 2001) have indicated that they were unmotivated and lacked the commitment to see out the course to completion. The situation that presented itself to me during the interviews both of students remaining in college and of those who had left showed that some students come to college because they have nothing else to do and nowhere else to go and mostly this is another factor of them not wanting to go out working just yet. Most want a qualification to progress in future employment but are not sure what to put down on their CAO application forms in early January and February.

This is usually where pre-entry information through the CAO handbook, the DIT prospectus, open days and other marketing information helps with the process of evaluating and selecting a college course or institution to include on the students application form. Parents, family and friends also have an influence on what the student will include on their application forms as they are seen as pre-entry information providers in their choice process. In the case of the mature student or the student returning to education or progressing within higher education the support they receive from administration staff and course tutors to provide them with this information is invaluable.

Costello and Russell (2001) discovered that students who cite wrong course choice are more likely to dropout. This supports earlier research by Martinez and Munday, (1998; 82). This initial course choice in their decision-making process is a crucial one to get right for both the potential student and college. After analysing all the interviews the following was discovered which had a direct relation with previous research reports.

#### 4. 2. 1. Motivation and Commitment

My initial question to most of the interviewees was why they wanted to leave or dropout from the course in the first place. All their responses were quite frank and referred to them simply not wanting to be on the course in the first place.

*I never wanted to do this I want to do Montessori or Social Care (line 2 interview 1). Well my Dad kind of knew I wouldn't like the course from the very start when I went. When I first started college they knew. I don't know, I must have looked unhappy and they just said, "You're not going to stay." Was that your first day? My first week. (Lines 57-60 interview 1)*

Or that it just wasn't for them, again referring to having made the wrong choice in the first place on the CAO applications forms in January.

*It just wasn't for me. I wasn't enjoying it. I didn't really know much about the course, but I put it down on the CAO [application form] and then I got it. (Line 18 interview 4) I tried a PLC course in Rathmines and got it. Journalism, but I wanted to go on to college and DIT. (Line 33 interview 4)*

The mature student I interviewed who had left the course said that she didn't feel a 'drive' or motive to 'keep at it'. She needed something more stimulating or new.

*I don't know if it had been something I had never done before, would I have had more of a drive or initiative to keep at it, but a lot of the subjects I would've touched on before in various courses that I have done. If it had been something completely new to me like ehm.... Sports Injury Management!!! Or something like that I hadn't studied in the past I don't know if I would have actually stuck it out a bit longer. (Line 25 interview 2)*

But the majority of students interviewed simply put it down to themselves and the fact that it wasn't for them.

*Oh yeah I liked the class I got on with everyone I got to know people well and the lecturers all were very nice and friendly. There was nothing wrong with DIT it was just me I wasn't into it at all. (Line 43 interview 4)*

*I just wasn't enjoying it really. (Line 12 interview 5)*

*Well I had no 'push'. It was all left up to yourself. I guess I was a bit immature and I had no motivation. (Line 14 interview 5)*



Of the students who were left on the course they had mixed responses to why they had chosen this course.

*Well I wanted to be a chef for years, but now I want to be a manager; (Focus group interview, respondent 2)*

*Yeah me too; (Focus group interview, respondent 4)*

*I wanted to be a hotel manager; (Focus group interview, respondent 5)*

*I wanted to work in tourism; (Focus group interview, respondent 6)*

As can be seen below many students are here because it may have been the only course they received from the CAO and college admissions procedures after their Leaving Cert. Or it was their first choice on the diploma list but they did not get any of their choices from the degree list. This however does not indicate if the first choice on the diploma was in fact their 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> choice overall.

*There was a variety of subjects on this course and I wanted to do something in management; I didn't get my first choice; (Focus group interview, respondent 1)*

*I was offered this on the CAO; (Focus group interview, respondent 3)*

*Didn't get any of my choices on the degree but this was my first on the Diploma list. (Focus group interview, respondent 7)*

But as one of the transfer students pointed out her experience of the industry before coming on to the course was helpful for preparing her for all that lay ahead of her.

*I like it more and I'd always worked in restaurants before so I knew what I was getting into, (Line 12 interview 6).* So on this note maybe an emphasis on prior industry work experience would be good for applicants coming on to a course.

As for the student who has since progressed onto a degree program in the college her first impressions or experiences of the course were quite similar to the students above who have left the college. She lacked motivation for the course and the course was clearly not attractive to her throughout the three years.

*I didn't like it in 1<sup>st</sup> year and I didn't like it in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and then when it came to the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> year I said ay I might as well finish it just get a Diploma behind me and then I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> year and I was like Geez what am I going to do now? (Line 4 interview 7).*



However she makes it clear later on in the interview that *what motivated [her] in the diploma was definitely the gang of friends, definitely. We had such fun.*

There were many reasons for students to come onto this course such as social life, reputation, its location, and the possibilities their qualification will bring them after they finish.

*All the DIT's, a social life, and a good student union; (Focus group interview respondent 1)*

*The prospectus and one of the chefs told me about the course; (Focus group interview respondent 2)*

*I wanted to stay in Dublin; (Focus group interview respondent 4)*

*Dublin was easy to commute to and I got advice from other people; (Focus group interview respondent 6)*

*Location, yeah. (Focus group interview respondent 7)*

*I wanted a good job in tourism and you can travel with this qualification; (Focus group interview respondent 6)*

*Variety of subjects offered and a good choice in third year so there's a good option you're too young to make decisions about your future so the variety...(Focus group interview respondent 1)*

*I took a year out after doing the business and tourism course in Tralee and worked in the industry. (Focus group interview respondent 2)*

Choice of courses and information provided to students or secondary schools is an area then that needs support from pre-entry information where the information for the course that students choose can be improved so that it is better understood by potential students and they will be inherently motivated by the course and themselves.

As outlined by the final responses above the admissions office could use alumni to market the course, and by highlighting its location as being one of the best for colleges in Dublin, and Ireland.

#### 4. 2. 2. Pre-entry Information and Admissions Procedures

Many students felt disappointed by the information they received prior to getting on the course:

*The prospectus has to be more detailed. They've only got a few lines on each subject; they don't give you a detailed description of what's going to be happening every week, or throughout the year or whatever. It might be better put on the website where they could say exactly what they were putting on the course on a day-to-day basis nearly. (Line 30-31 interview 1)*

However one student in particular got the information from a lecturer in the college and was quite happy about her course choice before she got onto the course:

*The company that I work with were doing a series of training programs with people from DIT and at the time I was considering leaving my position and was looking for something else. I was about to accept an offer from a hotel and I got talking to one of the lecturers just generally about my career path, about where I was going or where I wasn't going, because I felt like I was in a real rut. So we just got talking about my past history educationally and my work experience and she recommended that I apply for the, to do, to finish my diploma part time because I had started it in Galway in 1990, ... so it was her that kind of recommended that I apply, so I did and I was accepted in September 2003. (Line 3 interview 2)*

As indicated by the students' responses much of the information that students received about potential courses came directly from the CAO handbook. Surely this is not enough information for them to go on and make a decision where they will spend the next three to four years? The CAO handbook is only there for use as a reference and guide. Students are encouraged and advised to get more information from the college where the course will be held or from the Institute prospectuses.

*It looked good from the information the CAO handbook gave. And then I got it as it was my first choice, but I didn't know I would get so many points on the Leaving. It was filled out too early in school and I hadn't a clue what I was going to do. My parents were saying just put something down and the career guidance in school at the time wasn't much help either. I just put anything down I didn't really know. A friend of mine had gone to DIT and I suppose I wanted to go to DIT. The CAO highlighted the many courses that are done in DIT and I*

*thought sure if I can get in to one of the courses it wouldn't really matter what one. And everyone knows about DIT, don't ask me but I wanted to go to DIT. (Lines 19-21 interview 4)*

She did not indicate when asked if she had received a degree choice but had got a PLC course in Rathmines but wanted to get into DIT as one of her friends was in DIT and said it was good.

Sometimes these CAO application forms are completed in haste and students don't really know what they are doing. Time should be allocated for them to have sufficient time to fill out these forms and where they will get support from schools and colleges to do this. According to Brother Conway (a part time career guidance teacher in Offaly) sometimes the assistance given in schools to fill the CAO forms is quite good where each student is interviewed and their profile, grades and preferences is matched with courses on offer in colleges, but the final decision on courses remains with the student and their family. But not all schools provide this help.

*The CAO help to fill out the form was not great; (Focus group interview respondent 4)*

However like a lot of young students trying to decide what to do with the rest of their lives, they have sought help, guidance or advice from other people. These have primarily been family or friends and have sometimes not sought the advice but been given it anyway.

*Well my Mam was saying I could do the beauty course but just to get some other skill first and then I could go onto the other course after I had finished the Diploma, but she didn't want me doing just the beauty course. But I was interested in the Diploma. (Line 22 interview 5)*

*I looked at Shannon and I also talked to my boyfriend about it; (Focus group interview respondent 5)*

*Just family and friends; (Focus group interview respondent 6)*

*Guidance Counsellor. My brother is in Aungier Street. (Focus group interview respondent 7)*

One student having finished the diploma and currently in a degree program was still having second thoughts about the whole thing but indicated that her family have a huge influence on her decisions, *I would love to give up and Mammy would say just get out and get a job, but sure that Mammy's point of view and once she says that's all right then that makes me feel all right then, which is a bad thing in a way, but Daddy'd say stick at it, no stick at it and Rory is the same as well, my brother, he'd kill me [laughs] but sure I'm finished now, I'll be finished now in January and I have work placement then. Sure that's all right. (Line 16 interview 7)*

Not that many students come in to the college to 'check it out' before deciding whether it is for them or not, but for this student it has been influential in her decision.

*Yeah I came into the college to get a feel for it before deciding if I liked it or not; the staff seemed very friendly and helpful; (Focus group interview respondent 1)*

Colleges may not be in total control of the information that gets passed on to the student at secondary level as it gets passed on to career guidance, filtered through friends and family and their perception of the college, and 'Open Days' which are optional and students are only encouraged to attend. It is therefore a 'grey area' when it comes to pre entry information and guidance as to how this 'message' gets interpreted by the student. How can colleges ensure that this information is received properly? One area is through support from application to course commencement.

#### **4. 2. 3. Support from Application to Course Commencement**

One student in particular pointed out that it would be a good idea to have people from the college go into the schools to recruit future students. Or even a website where students can log on to check out this information for themselves.

*If someone came [from the college] I think it would be brilliant because you could ask them questions about the courses you want to do and they might give you a few more ideas and they [students] might change their mind or think of a different course; and I think it would be better. Or a website that you could go to and ask questions. I was on the DIT one [website] last night, but ehm, I was on it but I couldn't actually work my way around it; and I'm not too bad on the computer, but it wasn't too easy to find your way around. (Lines 35-37 interview 1)*

Another student indicated that it was the influence of lecturer who she spoke to before coming on the course that made her apply in the first place, but that she had more concerns about being back in college once she spoke to the tutor of the course at her interview.

*The tutor interviewed me and he did express concerns with the length of time I had been out of college, which in hindsight he was right. It took a little bit of getting used to going back to college being in the classroom environment, but the worst part was going off and researching and, I had everything in my mind, but just to actually communicate it to paper was a problem. It's different at work when you're doing a memo or you're doing a presentation to your boss or something like that.... (Lines 27-31 interview 2)*

*Well I was surprised when I was told I couldn't do ....I was advised in another way... but it took them so long to tell me the results. (Line 13 interview 3)*

Although this student is still deciding whether or not to stay in college in the future she is not in college at the moment and she feels very negatively about how she was told about having to repeat some subjects after spending some weeks in her third and final year at college.

*I was in for the first 2 weeks of lectures, like I was just getting settled in. The college was very badly organised. I think the repeat exams are too close to the academic year starting, and then you start the year but you're still waiting to hear about the results. (Line 15 interview 3)*

This obviously should not have happened and is not the usual college protocol.

A student still on the course said it might be a good idea to include a better map in the induction pack in future as she kept getting lost!

*Students from the country don't just need to be told about the college they need a tour of the immediate area or a map or something; the map of the colleges wasn't great I kept getting lost! [Laughter] (Focus group interview respondent 4)*

A student friendly website for course information search, including staff information details and location specific details should be available on the DIT website. When the interviews were conducted this was not obvious from the existing website but since then the DIT website has undergone a major overhaul and is much better and more user friendly. Open days where current students can talk to potential students is another option, and one which was used by the School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology this year to great success.



### **4. 3. Curriculum, Teaching and Learning: Findings from the Research**

Research suggests that there are many interlinked factors associated with course design, management and delivery, which directly affect retention. The degree to which particular factors are present varies from year to year and in fact from course to course. The induction process is an important one which helps with the transition of students from second level to third level but it should also be present for students who transfer into the college from outside, those who progress onto other courses or those who have deferred and are returning to finish off their qualification.

Evidence suggests that to a certain extent the quality of teaching and learning directly affects motivation among students. And it might have a direct bearing on reasons for dropout. Sometimes it is not the effect of the class itself but that which happens outside of the classroom that may have a direct influence on a student dropping out or not. This could be anything from availability of lecturers or support staff, gaps in student timetables, insufficient practical work, poor independent learning skills and increase in workload for subjects such as assessments and projects and poor basic learning skills. (Martinez and Munday, 1998; 85; Costello and Russell, 2001)

#### **4. 3. 1. Induction**

This area of the interviews was very positive in all the students' responses but it was found to be also quite important for them to discover what their college course was going to be like in the areas of specific classes. The induction period in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism takes place before the commencement of classes for all students. This is to assist them settling in to their new environments. However a lot of the students had already made up their minds about leaving by the time they had got to the induction stage as they may not have received the course they really wanted and in this case it is very difficult to retain these students.

*Right, I found out about the syllabus and all during the first week, and during the induction and I suppose I decided well there's no point in dropping out yet. I wanted to give myself at least three months to think about it. So I've done that. (Line 62 interview 1)*

One student in particular indicated that there needs to be more activities to keep the students occupied while they were waiting around for things to happen.

*I think it was ok. I think it could've been better organised because there was a lot of time we were just sitting around for maybe two to three hours waiting for uniforms or waiting for timetables or whatever. We were just sitting around. It did give us time to talk to each other but there were some people that were going over and sitting on their own at tables and stuff and it just gave people more time to feel isolated I think. .... And I thought that maybe they would feel like they didn't fit in already. So I think the time could have been managed better, like, keeping the reps of other classes around, or some sort of ice-breakers, or some sort of games, or bring people over to Kevin Street [Kevin Street has sports facilities, Cathal Brugha Street does not!] to do activities, exercises, I don't know...keep people occupied. (Lines 92-94 interview 1)*

Another student was very positive about the induction saying it was a chance for her to meet new people and make friends.

*The big thing is when you come into college first and meet new people. I was really looking forward to starting college and meeting new friends and people. The first couple of weeks are important. The first year can be tough, but second year you've gotten used to it...or you should have done! I loved the first couple of months in college because I wanted to get to know other people. And this was helped in a big way with the student union and their social events. This was really good in 2001-2002. It was crap in 2002-2003. (Line 54-55 interview 3)*

The social events organised by the student union were very important but she also pointed out that the student union was not great in 2002-2003, which may have had an impact on some students deciding to leave as there were not as many social events taking place. In 2003-2004 it was very well organised as indicated by my interview with Gerry Dunne and the induction outline, (see appendix A) and the responses given by two other students.

*The induction was grand...(Line 39 interview 4)*

*The induction days were really good...and the event that was great fun, but no the reason I've left was because when I got in to the subjects I just really didn't like it, and then I got the offer of the private college beauty course so I really didn't want to stay.....(Line 34 interview 5)*

*The induction was good and gave a general overview of first year and that's what it is; first year is very general. (Focus group interview respondent 6).*

However they continued to discuss this later on in the interview by indicating ways in which it could also be improved.

*All the information is there but we need to know more stuff during the induction days. Maybe about the subjects and how they are assessed and examined because when we went into your class which was one of the first you told us all about the subject the syllabus and the assessments and then they were up on WebCT a few days later but that wasn't the case with all the other subjects. (Focus group interview respondent 1)*

*Maybe you should get the second years and some of the other students to give the talks about what goes on, you'd be more likely to listen then....(Focus group interview respondent 6)*

One thing is clear however and that is that the timetable and information given to students in their induction time is important for them to keep up to date with everything that will be happening over the coming term(s) such as assessments and exams.

But induction should not only be for students coming in to the first year of a program. As was discovered from both the mature student, the student who had transferred into the diploma and the student currently on the degree program induction is not only welcome but important for them to 'blend in'... *the first day I went in it was the first class we had and she actually – not gave me an induction, but she was chatting about this year and what's....I suppose ay that's an induction in a way yeah. But ehm she says to me afterwards 'do you want to talk to me after class?' and I was like 'ok fair enough' and says to meself good you know some one to talk to you know tell me what to expect and what I should expect and stuff. But then she just says to me, 'how are you' and I says 'fine'. And she says 'are you settling in all right' and I says 'ay' I says 'I hope so' and so she goes 'that's all right'. And that was it [laughs]. And she says 'thanks very much' and I walked out and I was totally lost and I goes Jesus like you know she never said....she never really introduced me to the class (Line 66 interview 7).*

#### 4. 3. 2. Delivery, Timetables and Workload

In the case of delivery, timetable and workload I had expected this area to be quite negatively represented within the interviews. However only the issues of timetables and workload were matters for concern for the interviewees. For the first years and the mature student who left I have to assume they are referring to the workload in the first term as they were only in college for that term. For the other students their reference to workload was a general one and did not indicate which term or time of year this was more excessive.

*Yeah, the times of classes, on Tuesdays – fair enough we don't have classes after 1pm, but on Thursdays we have four hours off in the middle and we can't go home because, like, you can't go into work for a while because it takes an hour in on the bus and an hour back out. It's a bit silly we're hanging around. (Line 112 interview 1)*

*Well study was on your own and you got all the assignments, but I got all them in and that, but the time table was a mess some days....*

*Well...there were sometimes two and three hours in between classes and people would just go home, especially if you had to travel and all that, but economics was last thing on a Monday I think it was and it was hard enough to concentrate without it being the last class of the day....you were not too worried about going to those classes and then when you started missing a lot it was hard to go again...(Lines 16-18 interview 5)*

And workload for part time students was raised and suggested that it changes. Culture shock of being back in college studying again after a long time away from it was mentioned but it didn't emerge from any other interview. There is a 'return to learning' module specifically set up for students returning to college after a long gap between their studies but is optional. Maybe this should be made compulsory.

*But I didn't realise that it was going to be four evenings a week. And it was a major culture shock with the shift work I do, which was a big problem for me. I was missing half of it, I was exhausted tired. I couldn't concentrate on one or the other and I just thought that something had to give and unfortunately I couldn't afford to give up work and do it while working part*



*time you know if you've got mortgages to pay and cars. Its not like you're 20 or 21 [She was a mature student] anymore so that's why I had to pack it in. (Line 3 interview 2)*

*I wondered about the people doing Monday to Friday, 8-4 routine managed it because I work week on week off and even at that I was missing lecturers when I was I on the day shift. And when I was on nights I was getting home at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, up at 4pm drive into town, sit in class, not even retaining most of what I should've been and then heading into work afterwards until 12noon the next day and then going through the whole routine again. So even people working Monday to Friday I don't know how they managed it. (Line 7 interview 2)*

*I really think four evenings a week is too much. I really do, even if I'd gone through the first and second years, four evenings is an awful lot when you're holding down a fulltime job. I would've preferred to do it over two years, two evenings a week if that would have been possible. (Lines 50-52 interview 2)*

Even with a student who had completed a similar PLC course indicated that she was surprised with the increase in workload.

*Well I done a PLC in Galway but it didn't prepare me for it; it was totally different in like the workload. (Line 6 interview 6)*

I was a bit surprised to hear that the length of the Christmas holidays could be an issue when students are thinking of dropping out from a course but it must be said that when conducting my interviews most were done after the Christmas break as more students had decided to leave over the Christmas period.

*Oh yeah, the three week holiday at Christmas! You don't get a mid term and then that's your first break and it's a long one. It's your first holiday when in college. If you were thinking of leaving this might be a factor. I know a few of the girls in my first year left after Christmas and I know they may have stayed if they were in among friends instead at home over the break...(Line 57 interview 3)*

Another student simply raised the issue of the assessments as an area where they started to think about leaving the course.

*When we starting getting into the subjects and what they were all about. And then the first assessments were given to us and I just wasn't into it. (Line 39 interview 4)*



It has been noted in past school meetings that the assessments load on first year students can be a lot and needs to be pared down.

The workload was definitely an issue for all students even those who were still on the course. They have indicated that this might have been one of the reasons other students had left which supports the responses of the interviewees above.

*The huge variety of subjects; (Focus group interview respondent 2)*

*Yeah I totally agree; and it's the study and the long days and its hard when you have a part time job and if you're working maybe a split shift and trying to make college as well; (Focus group interview respondent 1)*

*They might just realise its not for them; (Focus group interview respondent 4)*

*We need more practicals, and maybe if they were spaced out over the year; (Focus group interview respondent 5)*

*Classes are boring sometimes and maybe they just left; (Focus group interview respondent 4)*

*And the timetable needs to be improved. (Focus group interview respondent 6)*

But whether it is the delivery, timetable or workload, a lot of the students' insecurities and their ability to stay in college, or not, also comes down to the consideration given to their academic ability.

#### **4. 3. 3. Teaching and Learning and Academic Ability**

How students can be treated in a college and their academic ability can also influence whether they will stay or leave. But as can be seen from the responses below the students felt very positive about the way they had been treated while in college.

*They all treated us well, like we were the same age as them as far as they were concerned.*

*I loved the lectures; they are all professional in the way they talked. (Lines 24-26 interview 1)*

*The bits that I did I really enjoyed and all, well most of the lecturers were really friendly and very approachable and you were treated like an adult, which is what you want when you come back into college at a later stage.... (Line 50 interview 2)*

This point was also supported by the student currently on the degree program and was one which she indicated had an influence on her decision to stay and get another qualification ... *I found he was a great help. I think he's...he's just so determined like and I think too and it's the same with you [interviewer] too, you carried us through the three years. (Line 23 interview 7)*

Considering the diversity of some subjects in the course I wasn't surprised to hear that some subjects were difficult to students, particularly the numerical subjects. This supports earlier research (Costello and Russell, 2001).

*One of the two subjects I had to repeat was accountancy and the older lecturer just retired this year so it was a different way of doing things, but he helped me along.... Computers, I know they're beneficial but I just can't work with them, I don't like them. (Lines 21–26 interview 3)*

*I mean economics was not enjoyable at all but it wasn't when I was in school so there's no difference there. (Line 47 interview 4)*

*At first I thought it was good all right and I liked the cooking and the practical classes, I loved front office and communications but it was.... Economics and the other subjects. ...accounting and quants.....(Line interview 5)*

*I knew the subjects but my biggest worry was the foreign language. That was the major worry I had going in to it. (Line interview 2)*

French was also a worry for the student now on the degree course...*the only thing I find impossible this year is French. The language is so hard. (Line 10 interview 7)*

For one of the students who have transferred into the diploma and is currently finishing her second year on the course she said one of the reasons she left the previous course was because... *I found that I wasn't up to the standard of the other...of my other classmates and I was struggling for basically first year and then I failed and I done the repeats and I got back into 2<sup>nd</sup> year but I knew that I wasn't able for it that's why I quit it. (Line 2 interview 6)*

## 4. 4. Student Support: Findings from the Research

As with studying and curricular support from the previous section students also need support in other ways such as in managing their time, money and personal life. They may also call on this support again when it comes down to transferring or progressing from course to course, or from college to college.

### 4. 4. 1. Personal and Other Difficulties

Although previous reports on student retention cited financial worries as the main concern over student dropouts only two interviewees mentioned their financial concerns as a reason for their dropping out.

*Oh yeah, that would have been a much better option if I had been more financially secure. If I didn't need my salary every month, if I could have survived on half of it then absolutely I'd still be here. (Line 9 interview 2)*

*Well it's mainly financial. I've been studying on my own because of registration fees. I would have had to register for the year and also for the two subjects I had to repeat. I couldn't afford it. (Line 5 interview 3)*

And also the area of payment for placements especially when students need to earn a living at Dublin standards!

*Maybe work for 4 days instead of 5 so that you can keep a job and earn some money because I was working for 5 days on the work experience and they were very good at letting me go early but I had one hour from when I finished on a Friday to get across town, home, change and get to my job to earn some money. Some weeks I was working 7 days straight. (Lines 33 interview 3)*

The follow up interview with students remaining on the course support the financial worries of the two interviewees above...*I agree but I think parents are left with a lot to do.... they can't afford a lot of the books etc (Focus group interview respondent 3) It's expensive to live up in Dublin; the grant is important but you still might have to get a part time job... (Focus group interview respondent 2) And the transport tickets have just gone up, again! It's just all too expensive these days. (Focus group interview respondent 1) Yeah I agree with #1. (Focus group interview respondent 6)*

In the case of financial worries student supports services should be able to help or the careers services. During my interview with Mr. Gerry Dunne he indicated that financial assistance with budgeting matters etc. is carried out through the student union services in the college.

#### **4. 4. 2. Student Support Services, College Facilities, Tutorial Support**

Many students sought the support of a lecturer rather than the support services in the college if they were faced with financial, academic or other problems. Some students were approached directly by lecturers if a problem presented itself to them, which is a positive finding from the research.

*Well our year head [tutor of the Diploma course] was very positive and helped a lot, but the person who eventually told me I couldn't stay in the college was not. (Line 17 interview 3)*  
*[The accountancy lecturer this year] was very helpful. One of the two subjects I had to repeat was accountancy and the older lecturer just retired this year so it was a different way of doing things, but he helped me along.*

*One of my lecturers I talked to him about it and he basically said that if I wasn't happy there was no point in being there (Line 4 interview 6)*

*So, basically the support came from a lecturer on the course and the careers service. That's up in Pembroke Street? I found what she said was kind of helpful, but I didn't think she had as much information than I'd hoped she'd have. (Lines 77-86 interview 1)*

However one support service in particular, the careers service, did not come out favourably in the perception of the students.

*The career guidance is not the best though. In college. We did some tests but they are not much use. And it's located over in another building, I think on the south side so there is not much free time for the students to go there and get back for the next class. I know she comes into the college but.... (Lines 38-40 interview 3)* *I was in with the career guidance a few times and I nearly came out crying and I says Mother of God how is that going to help me at all at all? And it didn't help me and I remember twice in 2<sup>nd</sup> year a gang of us went down, went down to [careers office] and we had ehm we had a few interviews and we were like that was such a waste of time such a waste! No good! (Line 84 interview 7)*

*Improve communication about student supports like I didn't know anything about a counsellor...or the fact that if you have to resist exams after September what happens? Also the career guidance needs to be versed on student wants and preferences. (Line 44 interview 3)*

The student union on the other hand received mixed responses. One year it was good, the next it wasn't. I suppose this depends greatly on the commitment of the individual students elected into the union each year and of course the budget they have at their disposal.

*And this was helped in a big way with the student union and their social events. This was really good in 2001-2002. It was crap in 2002-2003. That might not have helped...you need supports and the SU is one major area, which needs to be of help to new students...(Line 55 interview 3)*

Whereas in the mature students case she made the decision on her own as she may be quite used to doing this decision making at work all the time.

*No, I more or less made the decision myself. When I finished work one Wednesday morning and went home to bed for a few hours and I already had a presentation ready for Detta's class, Food and Beverage Management, and I had my German wine and Sec in the boot of my car all ready to go. And then the alarm went off and I did the usual, you know, "oh I'll get up in a minute," and I woke up at 6.40pm. And I just thought like this is not going to work so that's the straw that broke the camels back, you know? (Lines 15-16 interview 2)*

She had in fact known about the support services but did not, or could not avail of them because of her work commitments.

*I knew that there was a counsellor and career guidance department but I didn't avail of them. To me the major problem was the way I was working that was the major problem I had and then secondary to that was, well trying to focus I suppose on doing both [work and college]. (Lines 45 -47 interview 2)*

Another student simply admitted to having just left and not spoken to anyone, yet.

*I talked to no one about leaving. (Line 28 interview 5)*



Surprisingly a talk given to some students about their attendance, attitudes, and general behaviour etc. highlighted to one student the negative points of the industry and she just thought 'get out now'. Could this have been the turning point for this student?

*Well it wasn't really a talk; I think he came in to give out to us or something. Anyway the negative points stayed in my head afterwards. He said that the industry had the highest rate of divorce, or marriage breakdowns. He also said that not all of us would enter the hotel and catering industry, so I thought to myself I'll get out now I don't want to go down that road. I think he came in to give us some motivation or something but that's what I remember.*

The negative aspects of the industry was also a point made by the student who has continued onto the degree course after finishing her diploma as she did *not want to be slaving, not to be up till about 3 or 4am in the morning in a hotel* (Line 4 interview 7).

The students who remained on the course suggested some areas that need improving and which again they indicated that these could have influenced student dropout.

*I think we need help with a study plan for each subject; (Focus group interview respondent 4)*

*I would love more work experience advice, oh yeah and help coming up to the 1<sup>st</sup> year exams; (Focus group interview respondent 6)*

*The amount of computers available at any one time is not enough for the whole college or maybe give out laptops to students when they register like some colleges do. (Focus group interview respondent 1)*

#### **4. 4. 3. Transfer or Progression Arrangement**

Transfer and progression must be made more transparent to students who may be faced with the fact that they are not able to or don't want to continue with the course that they are currently on. Services within the college must be trained in advising students who find themselves in this predicament.

*I don't know if I can do that actually. I've been talking to the careers lady, Ann or Jill I think her name is, and she said I can't move between the DIT's, but I think I can move between the DIT's and not the IOT's, [not quite sure what these are] which are the rest of them in Ireland so I want to look that up before I dropout tomorrow to see if I can get a transfer instead.*

The student who has transferred into the diploma praised the staff in the college and said they were *very helpful, ehm, the first person that I contacted here was the Head of Department (Line 14 interview 6)*... and he was very helpful when she enquired about transferring into the course.

The fact that staff are very approachable is important for students to be able to ask questions especially when they are having problems...*very approachable like and you know all the lecturers are, you can go up to them afterwards and talk to them briefly whereas we didn't tend to do that in [the other course] (Line 16 interview 6).*

*One of the lecturers, he was definitely a big help and I was chatting to the tutor of the course about it a few times as well, ay, but he kept in contact with me during the summer to see you know to see how I was getting on and to hear if I had got any word back [about my degree] (Line 6 interview 7)*

As can be seen from the above comments the Head of Department, tutors, staff and lecturers in the college are seen as being friendly and approachable. This is helped through the commitment lecturers in the School give to the induction period and through getting to know the students on a first name basis in their classes. Unfortunately the student services are not seen as being as approachable.

It is also clear from the above comments that students especially in first year still seek direction in their learning environment with requests for study plans and assistance coming up to the exam period. This is going to be further helped next year as the college goes modular and the students will have to be more focused for their own sake when it comes to the end of the first term with their first exams new modules to take up after the Christmas break.

Again having spoken to Mr. Gerry Dunne he has assured me that a further induction period in around November will be made available to these students to prepare them for the first set of exams at the end of the first term (September to Christmas). This is already available to the students through the college in the case of individual classes or through the counsellor. Students also indicated that certain student facilities such as computers are lacking in the School.

#### 4. 5. Summary of Findings: Some key comments

The following comments I have chosen from the above research findings I feel present a summary and brief account of some of the key findings from all the interviews in relation to the outline of the chapter adapted from Martinez and Munday (1998).

The interpretation of the findings above will be made in the following chapter, chapter five, where the findings will be deduced with the initial research aims.

<b>Pre-entry, Guidance and Admissions Procedures</b>	<i>I didn't really know much about the course, but I put it down on the CAO [application form] and then I got it.</i>
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*Well I had no 'push'. It was all left up to yourself. I guess I was a bit immature and I had no motivation.*

*The prospectus has to be more detailed.*

*It [CAO form] was filled out too early in school and I hadn't a clue what I was going to do.*

*Yeah I came into the college to get a feel for it before deciding if I liked it or not; the staff seemed very friendly and helpful*

*If someone came [from the college] I think it would be brilliant because you could ask them questions about the courses you want to do and they might give you a few more ideas*

## **Curriculum, Teaching and Learning**

*I was really looking forward to starting college and meeting new friends and people. The first couple of weeks are important. The first year can be tough.*

*The induction days were really good...and the event that was great fun, but no, the reason I've left was because when I got in to the subjects I just really didn't like it,*

*Well study was on your own and you got all the assignments, but I got all them in and that, but the time table was a mess some days....*

*The bits that I did I really enjoyed and all, well most of the lecturers were really friendly and very approachable and you were treated like an adult, which is what you want when you come back into college at a later stage.*

## **Student Supports**

*And this was helped in a big way with the student union and their social events. This was really good in 2001-2002. It was crap in 2002-2003.*

*The career guidance is not the best though. In college. We did some tests but they are not much use. And it's located over in another building, I think on the south side so there is not much free time for the students to go there and get back for the next class.*

*Oh yeah, that would have been a much better option if I had been more financially secure. If I didn't need my salary every month, if I could have survived on half of it then absolutely I'd still be here.*

**Chapter Five: Interpretation and Analysis of the Research Findings**



## 5. 1. Introduction

The findings outlined in the previous chapter give us a brief glimpse at the attitudes and opinions of students who have left and compared to those who are still on the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management, or are currently pursuing some other qualification. This is the tip of the iceberg as not all students who had left the course in the last year came forward to be interviewed for personal or logistical reasons (one student who had left after the second year of the part time diploma is now living and working in South America and another has returned to their home in the Czech Republic). The following is an interpretation of chapter four's findings in relation to the research questions posed at the beginning of the research.

## 5. 2. Research Aim Number One:

*Part 1: Is there a gap between what we as an educational institute are providing and what the student expects to get from college?*

Many students who were interviewed said they were disappointed with the information they received prior to getting on the course, *'the prospectus has to be more detailed.'* This was also indicated in a presentation made recently at DIT by Prof. Gina Wisker (06/05/04) on reasons for student dropout. Having seen the prospectus I feel it as detailed as it can be for marketing purposes. Therefore there must be some gap of information reception or understanding if the students have left. However if we look again at some of those students who have left this course would not have been their first choice and therefore these students would become unmotivated to remain on a course they simply do not want to do or are unhappy about continuing, such as *'it wasn't for me, I wasn't enjoying it. I didn't really know much about the course but I put it down and then I got it'*. Wrong choice of programme was also indicated in Wisker's presentation.

Of the students who were interviewed those who had left only two had indicated this was their first diploma choice but this may not mean it was their overall first choice. The mature student came in through an interview but had indicated that what she really wanted was to return to college to finish her qualification.

One student indicated the overall first choice for her would have been the Degree in Hotel and Catering Management but she only got the points for the diploma. However she went on to

say that she really wanted to do a beautician's course but was influenced by her mother to do the Hotel and Catering Management course first. She has since enrolled in a beauty course in Dublin. Another student indicated that she really wanted to be a teacher but failed Irish and was going to go back to improve her grade and hopefully get into teaching college next year.

Of the students who remain on the course and who were interviewed through the focus group this year not one indicated that this was their first choice. In fact some of these students indicated that they were interested in other courses but *'only got offered this course on the CAO.'*

In Costello and Russell's (2003) report they have indicated that the largest number of withdrawals or dropouts was of students on their first CAO choice. However considering that 35 students left from a first choice course indicates a poor decision making process in selecting course among students (Costello and Russell, 2003; 12).

There are open days in colleges to provide information to potential students wishing to get onto a course; however some students indicated that they had been too busy with their Leaving Cert study to go to any of them... *'I never had the time because I was studying'*. This open day is held in Aungier Street campus for the entire DIT and is usually around the same time the CAO application forms need to be completed so it occurs at an appropriate time, around January.

Maybe students in their second last year in secondary school should also be encouraged to attend these open days as well so that they will not be making their decision very soon before they have to complete their CAO forms. And if they can't attend these open days surely they should be able to call in to the college to 'check it out' for themselves in their own time which in fact helped one of the students still on the course, *'I came into the college to get a feel for it before deciding if I liked it or not and the staff seemed very friendly and helpful'*. However, this would not be feasible for all students, especially those students from long distances outside Dublin.

Some of the students indicated that the prospectus needs changing to make it more student-friendly, or a website they could access to ask questions or source more information about courses. Since one of the students was interviewed, the DIT website has changed and has

become more user-friendly. But most other students get their information about a course simply through the CAO help manual, *'it looked good from the information the CAO handbook gave'*. This is only a list but it is a tool by which they fill in their forms each year and it was indicated that the information on this manual *'highlighted the many courses that are done in DIT'*. These students are in fact advised to seek out college prospectuses for further information but this may not happen. Career guidance teachers and parents have therefore a responsibility to provide adequate information to allow these students make a good choice at this time.

As the CAO procedure for gaining entry to college is still seen as the fairest way of choosing students out of hundreds of applications we still rely heavily on it for getting students onto courses, however the final decision of taking a student onto a course still remains with the college or institution so we must still provide properly detailed prospectus for students.

***Part 2: And what about the information gaps between what the students receive pre decision-making and what is provided to them before completing their CAO (Central Applications Office) application form from colleges and career guidance?***

Students indicated that this information needs improving either having staff from the college visit some schools or have a question and answer section on the website for queries. These are good suggestions, *'if someone came from the college ... you could ask them questions about the courses ... and they could give you a few ideas.'*

Dundalk IT turns this around and invites potential students in the area to come in to them if they need help filling in their CAO forms in January and this works very well as they have a huge demand for this service according to Joe Erraught, (Assistant Head of the School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology, DIT). However it still remains that a lot of students do not know what they want as they might be young and undecided at the time of filling in the CAO form and hence this is done in haste and repented after the Leaving Cert results have been received.

### 5. 3. Research Aim Number Two:

*What are we doing to help retain our students in college or at least to help them onto courses that they would actually like to study?*

It is obvious from a lot of the students' comments from the previous chapter that the tutor and staff support is quite good and that all lecturers were very approachable when they needed to talk to someone, *'very approachable like and you know all the lecturers and you can go up to them afterwards and talk to them'*. This is a very positive finding from the research as it can be a simple chat in your office with a student that can influence their decision to stay or leave or in fact make their decision seem that little bit easier to make. Prof. Wisker stated that student staff interaction was really important when trying to retain students. In one of her scenario's of student dropout one such student continuously tried to contact her to talk about leaving college but having had no luck eventually left. Therefore we must try and allocate time to enable us to meet with our students outside class times if they need to talk to us.

Sometimes they only need to know about what options they have or what is available to them and this should come from the career guidance, student services or the counsellor. Not one of the students mentioned the counsellor but those who mentioned the careers service did so in an unfavourable way, *'the career guidance [in college] is not the best though,'* and *'I was in with the career guidance a few times and I nearly came out crying and I says Mother of God how is that going to help me at all at all?'* Unfortunately these are very strong comments about a service which is there to help students decide about their careers and their future but which the students, who were interviewed, found to be very inadequate.

Again this was supported through Prof. Wisker through her student retention presentation when she indicated that the student support network in the college is extremely important resource where personal contact and information can be provided through the student services, students union and chaplaincy and this is a place which should be coordinated with their academic timetable.



## **5. 4. Research Aim Number Three:**

***Part 1: Do we know where our students go once they leave a course by their own choice or through progression? What has happened to them?***

This was easy to find out about the students that I interviewed. Five students I interviewed who have dropped out of college all five are currently in employment, and three plan to continue in further study in the future pending acceptance onto the course of their choice.

Three of these interviewees had decided to take a year out and work while they were waiting to get back into college. One is now deciding whether or not to try to get back in to the part time course instead of completing the course full time sometime in the future. This student has been out of the college for a year working. Two of the interviews that I conducted were with students who had progressed onto another course (which was a degree within DIT) or transferred into this diploma (from another diploma course within DIT) to see if their experiences were similar.

Of the registered list of students from this years cohort (year one fulltime diploma) 14 have left the course ( $14/71 = 19\%$ ), 2 left before classes commenced but were registered as students on the course, 2 left just before the exams commenced but had indicated that they were considering this for quite a while. 10 left before Christmas and of those 10 students, 4 could not be located or did not come forward to be interviewed, 3 were interviewed and 3 declined to come forward but indicated it was because of personal and family reasons and they did not want to be interviewed. One student actually got in touch with me from the US where she is now living and trying to get in to college later in the fall. A student who was on the registered list is now on another course in the college since the first week.

***Part 2: Why did they leave and where did they go?***

Some of the reasons why students left was simply that it was '*not for them*', they might have made the '*wrong choice*' on the CAO, or having made the choice of doing the diploma they were '*not liking the course*' since commencing it in September. These reasons all support previous research published (Costello and Russell, 2003). However one such comment, which was '*finding out about the negative aspects of the industry*' was somewhat surprising as this was discovered through a talk given to them in college.



Most of the students who have since left have now taken up part time or fulltime employment. For some this is a means to an end to gather enough money to cover their fees for another course that they wish to pursue in the future, *'I'm going to do a beauty course in Dun Laoghaire, in the private college there. I'll have to pay the fees so I'm working to get the fees together,'* but for others it has been one of the reasons why they left in the first place, i.e. financial, *'if I didn't need my salary every month, if I could have survived on half of it then absolutely I'd still be here.'* The proposed introduction of fees for third level colleges might increase the level of financial constraints on families of students attending colleges and will also increase the competition of these colleges vying for these students to take up their offers (Priestly cited in Coates, 2004).

## **5. 5. Research Aim Number Four:**

***What influences their choice to 'dropout' or progress onto another source of education or employment?***

The reasons for leaving were many but came down to the simple fact that it *'wasn't for them'* or that they just *'weren't enjoying it'*. Other students said it was partly to do with the timetable, *'sometimes there were two and three hours in between classes and if you had to travel you just went home ... when you started missing a lot it was hard to go again,'* and workload, *'I really think four evenings a week is too much.'* Whereas for others it was the fact that they couldn't afford it, *'I couldn't afford to give up work.'*

Academic ability is an area that is cited by many students who have left or changed courses. The student who has since transferred into the diploma put it down to being unmotivated when she realised that she wasn't up to the standards of other students and that she wasn't able for it, *'I knew I wasn't able for it and that's why I quit.'*

The influence of family and friends is another factor that may sway a student's decision. A student who has since progressed onto the degree program indicated she didn't want to let others down, *'Daddy, I would hate to let me father down and now I know I wouldn't but just to achieve something like that Daddy'd be so proud of me and that's what motivates me probably just to carry on as well.'*

## **5. 6. Conclusions**

The information delivered to potential students about courses on offer in any college, university or institution must have a positive impact on the decisions students make about the course or program they will undertake to gain a qualification in third level education. Prospectuses, CAO information, open days, and college websites must be accurate and precise with all contact details given in the case that a student needs to follow up on some information or ask a question.

It has to be said that the DIT website previous to its current one was not user friendly and was difficult for a first time user to find the information they required. The new DIT website is much better and easier to navigate, providing information in many different forms and search engines to aid the information search even further. Staff contact details are present for everyone and there are also diary pop ups indicating open days or information events for potential students.

There is considerable variation in the needs of students and the reasons for students leaving courses. This requires all retention efforts to be personalized to their needs and to preempt reasons for student dropout. The creation of effective student support systems that integrate resources students' needs, such as the careers and students services, when they are deciding to move on in their education or dropout of education is extremely important.

The assignment of lecturers as tutors is important but these tutors must make themselves known to the students as some do not know who to talk to if and when they have a problem. It is important these tutors are present at induction days and events and visits the classes (if they do not teach the particular cohort) throughout the year.

Flexibility in our delivery of modules, courses or programs may also aid retention of students in the future, as the student may not need to be in a classroom to be a learner or a student of the institution. Use of WebCT as a support to a class, and tools of distance education may also need to be introduced for students who may not be able to attend for many personal or logistical circumstances. WebCT has been phased in to the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism this year and has been seen as a welcome improvement by current students and lecturers alike once used properly.

I have used this WebCT tool in my own classes and I have noticed an improvement in student involvement in the lecture and tutorials as they have at their fingertips support materials and lists of topics coming up in the future. It has to be said not all students embrace this method of teaching as they prefer the traditional lecture method and therefore this is one reason why I use it simply as a support to my lectures.

The following and final chapter concludes the research by making recommendations from the research in relation to the three primary objectives outlined at the start.

**Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations**

## 6. 1. Conclusions and Recommendations

Previous dropout figures for the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management indicated that a 32.4% (or 23 students) withdrawal rate in 2003 was the highest dropout number in the Faculty of Tourism and Food. This compared with a dropout of less than 10 students in the remaining 11 out of 12 courses. This year the dropout rate for the Diploma course was 19% (or 14 students – June 2004). These figures are still provisional, as the exact figure will be known when this cohort reregisters in September for the new term. These figures are also relative to the size of the course as the Diploma course is also the largest class in the college. For some students this may increase their feeling of isolation.

The following recommendations were made following the analysis and interpretation of all interviews conducted and outlined in chapters four and five above.

## 6. 2. Research Objective One:

*To provide information to the admissions office within the DIT, especially the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, to enable them to market more effectively to students in the future.*

As the decision making process for students going on to higher education is a crucial point in their lives, and the choices and array of courses being offered by competing colleges is many, assistance in the course choice or decision process should be made available by colleges to these potential students. Contact with potential students can be easily done through college visits and contact details given by mature students to enable these potential students make the right choice about going to college. As lecturers have a lot to do with getting their course work in order for the year this should be carried out by tutors of the courses and admissions staff, or maybe a separate marketing department. Some other colleges and institutes have a policy of contacting potential students through the choices made through CAO by sending them invitations to come in to the college when they can or invitations to contact them if they have any further queries. According to a colleague's brother who has applied to the University of Limerick he has received two such invitations since submitting his application in January. This can help the students' decision-making process up to the final decision in July.



As the research showed that many students relied only on the information available in the CAO handbook this is clearly affecting their decisions, as this is merely a list of course names and codes and other information should be made available to these students. This can be provided through the prospectuses. These can be given to the career guidance services within the schools. This then requires a tighter networking of career guidance in schools with careers services or tutors in colleges and vice versa.

All information should be as accurate and clear as possible, and contact details per course should be given or made available. This is the case with the current prospectuses in DIT. However, students who have left the course indicated that the prospectus did not carry 'enough' information for them and one student indicated that a subject-by-subject breakdown would be helpful with possible assessment examples given. This can be given on the college website.

### **6. 3. Research Objective Two:**

*To assist the retention office of the DIT with their efforts in the future retention of students.*

Induction programs were highlighted by previous reports and all students interviewed as an important part of the students adaptation to the higher education environment and a key moment in some of their decision process of whether to stay or go. The induction should not only be available to full time students but part time students as well. In fact it is probably more important with part time students as they may need help adjusting to the prospects of returning to studying and education after a number of years out of the classroom. Or having never completed anything more than the equivalent to the junior certificate before, and having worked for a number of years, they may need what we provide in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, and in particular one of our night time certificate programs a return to study module highlighting issues such as time management, note taking and concentration and memory exercises.

In the course of their programs study skills should be also available to all students entering an institution for the first time or when they need an extra helping hand such as before assessments or exams.

Study rooms or common areas for work such as the computer facilities and reading rooms in or near a library should also be available. Common access computer rooms are available at the moment but according to the students interviewed not enough supply to meet demand. This problem may increase in the future as the number of computer classes increase according to a computer lecturer in the School.

Having teaching staff as tutors on courses will help when students are faced with difficult decisions to make throughout the year. As students indicated the teaching staff and lecturers on the course were seen as being friendly and approachable and helped in some way when they had to come to a decision. However, time should be made available for them to come and discuss this with their tutor at appointed times convenient to both tutor and student as this was seen to be a problem given in a scenario by Prof. Gina Wisker about one of her students called 'Ollie' who tried to speak to her but eventually dropped out (Teaching and Learning conference, Aungier Street, 06/05/04).

#### **6. 4. Research Objective Three:**

*To highlight the recurring issues affecting the influence of dropout students or students who progress onto other education or employment, and to assist students when making this choice.*

As wrong course choice was a predominant feature for students leaving the Diploma the recommendations made under objective one would be appropriate here also. Other areas such as problems with finance could be aided through the student services or special student loans in Banks and Building Societies. Accommodation and living in Dublin could be better aided through the student services where lists are provided for students looking for accommodation in September. Could this be made available earlier, say when the results come out. I have heard of students complaining that by the time the lists are made available to them that the accommodation has gone. There is an accommodation crisis of sorts for students in the Dublin area, which adds to their financial worries. Hence some students take up part time jobs to fund their lifestyles. Would these worries be eased further if student accommodation were to be provided on the proposed new DIT campus at Grangegorman?

However other issues such as timetables and the logistics of teaching and learning for students also need to be reviewed. Do the students have to be in the college to effectively learn? Use of WebCT was introduced into the Faculty of Tourism and Food, in particular the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism this year and it has seemed to be welcomed by most students. However it must not be a substitute for lecturing or teaching but as an additional support in the area of tutorials, communications and a contact medium for students.

#### **6. 4. Other Recommendations Arising from the Research**

The following is a list of further recommendations arising from the research, and is not an exhaustive list but maybe a more feasible and manageable list of recommendations to be employed in the near future:

- Compulsory attendance at induction programs as this is a key time in the student experience of higher education. It would also be a very good idea if students presently on the second or third year programs came to give these students a tour of the building or other such orientation assistance;
- Tracking of students through registers or other means, maybe through signature lists (which are used through many classes). This can also be done electronically through the WebCT program;
- Mentoring through student-to-student 'buddy' systems and tutoring provided by senior undergraduates or postgraduates from the same or similar courses can help through study programs or simply settling in to college life;
- Service Learning can be introduced to tutorials or the learning and teaching strategy so the student gets hands on experience of the industry or service at an early stage in their careers and can experience the enjoyable elements of the industry;
- Diversity in education (e-learning and distance education etc) so that all types of student learning can be accommodated and which might reduce the workload or contact time for students;
- Learning contracts might help with motivation and the commitment of students to courses and can also outline for them assessments, exams and other projects that are to be submitted in a more organised fashion than what they might be used to doing themselves;

- Professional and industry involvement can highlight careers in the industry and provide a 'face' in the industry. This can also be assisted through Alumni in the industry coming to open days or events in the college;
- Career education provided through the tutors, lecturers, careers services and student services within the college and through Alumni visits to the college can also assist these students when they are making some very important decisions in their lives.

## **6. 5. Contribution of this Research**

This research was conducted in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism and is a tip of the iceberg as to what could be discovered given access to all courses in the college and students to conduct a full survey of reasons of student dropout. However it supports previous research by the Retention Office into the reasons of student dropout. It has also highlighted for me that dropout surveys must be done with all students and not only those students who have left as this gives a broader picture of what is happening within the college or institute. It should also be done on a class-by-class basis as was also highlighted by another study conducted by Dr. Cecelia Chan (Aungier Street presentation 06/05/04).

This research also highlighted the fact that students thinking about dropping out are more likely to do so in three stages, 1) just as the college commences due to wrong choice or failure to adjust, 2) just before the end of the first term or beginning of the second term (around Christmas time) because of academic ability, simply not enjoying the course or wanting to do something else having given this course a go but not liking it, and then finally 3) just before or after exams as the students maybe weak academically or not at all motivated to continue. Surveys could also be staggered around these periods to pinpoint what happens to trigger the choice of leaving.

If only for myself I have clarified some of the reasons why students leave a course but I will also make this thesis available to the college and in particular to the tutors of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management (soon to become the BA (ord.) in Hotel and Restaurant Management) so that they may have a clearer understanding of why these Diploma students have left.

## **6. 6. Areas for Further Research**

This research should continue as it is clear that the dropout phenomenon remains unique per student however common the overall reasons may be. It would have been ideal to take a more longitudinal view of dropout but as time is limited this study can only be covered for the current 2003-2004 cohort.

A recommendation for further research would be for a qualitative and quantitative survey to be conducted concurrently per course basis. This would aid future engineering of courses and provide information for future school reviews. The surveys could also be staggered throughout the year to catch all students going through their choices of staying or leaving.

## **6. 7. Conclusions**

I have some final suggestions to make taken from this study for a retention strategy.

### **Getting to know our students**

Getting to know our students is very important for their adjustment to college life and also so they would not feel so isolated. This should be assisted through second and further years on the course during orientation and ‘buddy’ systems. Orientation must be obligatory.

### **Study programs and ‘Buddy’ systems**

Study programs and assistance can also be provided through this ‘buddy’ system where academically weak students can be helped through their course.

### **Become Motivated**

We must take an interest ourselves in the students and our courses if we expect them to be interested. It may sound like this is obvious but students notice everything and if it is a lecturer who lacks interest in teaching them then they will also lack interest.



### **Student-lecturer interaction outside of the classroom**

We must endeavour to help students when they look for help. Student lecturer interaction must also exist outside of the classroom and then this could also make students feel more involved. We must try and allocate time to enable us to meet with our students outside class times if they need to talk to us. This must also be provided for lecturers on a course if students feel more comfortable talking to their lecturers on an unofficial basis. An hour on a lecturer's timetable for student meetings of any kind should be available.

### **Allocation of lecturers as tutors**

Allocation of lecturers as tutors for the entire course and also for each year of the course is also an important area where the support services can liaise. Students can also approach a lecturer they know when they have a problem or vice versa a lecturer can highlight a student who may be having a problem to other lecturers or staff and where this problem can be ironed out before it becomes a retention issue.

### **Student support networks**

The student support network in the college is an extremely important network, which must have the proper funds available to provide their services to students throughout the college. They must also be visible throughout the college and not hidden away down some corridor. Student services, student union, chaplaincy and counselling should be available throughout the student's time in college.

For part time students it is difficult to get to any of these services as their office hours do not coincide with the part time timetable at night. There should be some services also available to these students.

### **Liaising with secondary schools**

Not only is the student support network in the college important but so too is the network that exists in their secondary schools. Liaising with career guidance teachers at second level is important so that the correct information is passed on to potential students. This can be carried out through the tutors and a marketing department, but can also be assisted through visits by lecturers and tutors to these schools.

### **Course information must improve**

Marketing of courses must improve either through college open days, dissemination of course information on the college website, through visits of college staff to schools in catchments areas, liaising with the career guidance network, or direct marketing by the college to potential students after the initial details of students have been received from the CAO to enhance their decision making process up to the final decision in July.

Separate marketing departments or marketing personnel should be appointed for this to happen effectively. This already exists on some courses such as the masters courses in DIT, Aungier Street.

A course-by-course and subject-by-subject breakdown of information could also be disseminated through the college website. An indication of the use of WebCT for these courses may also be a positive factor for future students.

### **Recognition of the individual needs of students**

The needs of one student from another can differ greatly and even though some students will suggest general reasons for dropping out such as the course just *'wasn't for them'* which agrees with other research findings of wrong course choice, future studies or retention strategies should remember that each student is individual in their experiences and feelings as to why they have chosen the wrong course or why the course *'wasn't for them'*.

Even though certain patterns emerged through this research which may have agreed with previous research, when these students were probed as to why they left or stayed each has a personal and unique viewpoint and opinion which is important and which must not be ignored. Retention efforts should therefore be made personal to each individual student.

As a potential dropout student when I was in college myself this is definitely true as my reasons for staying (or leaving) were not highlighted in this research or previous studies.

### **Attendance and tracking of students**

Tracking of these students can be easily done through the WebCT learning tool used through the college or an attendance list must be taken in each class. The tutor could then contact a student who failed to show up to class frequently. This would help retain students in the future or prevent them from falling out of the system by helping them make the right choice.

### **Retention studies must be focused on a course-by-course basis**

Retention studies should be done on a course-by-course basis as some courses may experience a higher rate of dropout than others in a faculty. Reasons for this dropout may reflect directly on the course content or other specific areas only related to this course. Previous research studies by the Retention Office suggests this is in operation already as their research is carried out on a faculty and school basis with a break down of statistics per course.

### **Staggering of Retention Survey's**

In conclusion a retention survey could be staggered throughout the year to pinpoint what happens to students that triggers their choice of staying or leaving and therefore may highlight retention issues. This can be done after induction, before Christmas, after Christmas and before or after exams.

Finally it must be noted that a move to make this course a degree from September 2004 will impact on the retention, dropout or progression rate of this course from now on and therefore this study should continue into next years cohort of students and into future years.

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**Web Resources: (sourced 2/10/03)**

<http://www.hueristicparadigm.com/paradigm.htm>

<http://www2.bc.edu/~evansec/curriculum/LeCompte>

[http://carbon.cuinver.edudata/~mryder/itc\\_data.html](http://carbon.cuinver.edudata/~mryder/itc_data.html)

[http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/93\\_docs/BECK.htm](http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/EPS/PES-yearbook/93_docs/BECK.htm)

<http://education.curtin.edu.au/iier/iier1/hall.html>

<http://education.curtin.edu.au/iier/iier11/partington.html>

<http://www.bera.ac.uk/ri/no70hammersley.html>

<http://educationcurtin.eduau/iier/iier13/darlaston-jones.html>

<http://educationcurtin.eduau/iier/iier13/imbroxiano.html>

<http://educationcurtin.eduau/iier/iier13/forster.html>

<http://educationcurtin.eduau/iier/iier2/thompson.html>

<http://www.uea.ac.uk/care/elu/issues/research/res1ch4.html>

<http://www.leresearch.com/FocusGroups.htm>

<http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sru/SRU19.html>

<http://www.groupsplus.com/pages/articles.html>

<http://www.scu.edu/au/schools/gcm/ar/arr/arrow/rlewis.html>

## Appendices



## **Appendix A: Interview Transcript with Induction Coordinator with the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Mr. Gerry Dunne**

**26<sup>th</sup> February 2004, 11.00-12.00.**

For the purposes of this interview the interviewer will be referred to as 'Q' and the interviewee as Gerry.

**Q:** Well I'll start off by saying I'm going to be talking to Gerry Dunne. He is the induction co-ordinator, if I could say so much.... [Laughter]....

**Gerry:** Induction Director! [Laughter]

**Q:** ...for the DIT Cathal Brugha Street, Faculty of Tourism and Food.

**Gerry:** Ohm.

**Q:** You do all the inductions do you?

**Gerry:** Well, eh, technically my brief was not to, was just to do the 01 school (School of Hospitality Management and Tourism), ehm, the 02 school (School of Culinary Arts) tend to do their own thing.

**Q:** OK. But do you do another school?

**Gerry:** The 04 school (School of Environmental Health Management), yeah, we set up an induction committee at the start and the 04 school have a representative at that, Greg Burke, and he more or less weighs in with us. But because of the budget situation at the moment not every school will agree with what we're doing. The 04 school have more or less done exactly the same as us (01 school) but the 02 school do their own thing.

**Q:** Ok, when did you take on the responsibility of doing the induction?

**Gerry:** I took over from Phil Hanlon, eh...the last one was the second one I did so we'll say that was ... that would have been 2003, 2002; so I did 2002- 2003 induction and 2003- 2004. So the last one Phil did would have been 2001.



**Q:** Ok – so what do you think is the purpose of the induction, or do you think we need to have and induction at all?

**Gerry:** No, I think it is very important, eh, I think all the studies show that induction helps students in the transition to sort of orient them, ehm, to the new environment that they're in, ehm, because you know obviously you know they're still reasonably young – they're still 17/18 years or mostly, and, ehm, they have a lot of I suppose fears coming in to you know a fairly daunting institute so the induction does help with all of that.

As well as just giving them the information that they need, it's also a case that ehm, it helps them...

One of the things where we decided to change induction when I took over was there was going to be a lot more emphasis on them getting to know each other, getting to know the tutor, ehm, I suppose those are the two main things – getting to know their tutor we'll say and their actual course and getting to know their colleagues in particular and less emphasis on information, information, information. You know just bombarding them with information, ehm, so we actually changed things around quite a bit and we put in things like the event and where they would go on a class event, ehm, which hadn't been done before where they would go on a mystery tour, treasure hunt etc. So the idea was that they would, you know ... a lot of the barriers would break down between them and by the end of the day, by the end of one of the days of induction that they would definitely have made friends with some people. A lot of the information would come later, do you know what I mean, so that they wouldn't be hit with all the information on the first day.

There's certain information that they have to get on day one and day two, but a lot of it could be delivered to them later on. So that was the idea to change. We definitely changed it quite a bit, and we changed it specifically because of the research that was telling us that you know students' big fears are you know:

- Will I fit in with my class members?
- Have I chosen the right course?

So those were the two things that we tended to address, so we put a lot of emphasis on them meeting their class tutor, getting to know their course quite well and what it involved and getting to know their colleagues as well.

**Q:** You said that this was based on research that was done in the past?

**Gerry:** Yeah.

**Q:** Is this the research that Frank Costello and the retention office have done?

**Gerry:** Yeah.

**Q:** The induction committee that you've mentioned, did Frank have any part to play on the induction committee?

**Gerry:** Yeah. When I started the first thing to do was set up the induction committee. Now the induction committee usually consisted of Frank Costello (Retention Officer), Jill Barrett (Careers Officer), the counsellor, and Sister Margaret (School Chaplain). Then a representative from the student union, the porter Joe O'Brien, or somebody because obviously you need to have a stand in the lobby, and the entire course tutors, they all were on it. So that was kind of the core and all the decisions were made.

It wasn't my decision. Basically when I started I said as far as I'm concerned this is a clean slate, where do we go from here? And then Frank, you know, was very much you know, "We need to concentrate on the student and their first days," and that's really where it came from those initial meetings and that's the emphasis we wanted to make.

**Q:** You said at the beginning that a lot of them get bombarded with information and you wanted to focus in on them as students and making friends and socialising in the first few days. What are you doing that's different than before?

**Gerry:** Yeah, well, when I took over, and Phil had found this, that they were actually trying to fill a week with things to do with them, and it was getting ridiculous, you know. And the students were...you weren't doing the students any favours because they knew it was all padding if you like, do you know what I mean? So we felt like, "why do that"? It's better to give them two good days rather than 4 kind of padded days so in the end we just decided to let's just go with the two to two and half days and let them off for the other two days so they could find a flat or something like that, do you know what I mean? That's basically what we did, so ehm...

Then the social event was something that we decided should definitely take half day ...

And ehm we made a mistake the first year. We actually timetabled an hour into their timetable when we would give them a lot of the information, you know like – what does the

library service do; what about the counselling service; you know all of this.... unfortunately we timetabled it for a Friday but it didn't work as no one turned up for it as it was on in the afternoon. So ehm, we cancelled that the next time. We did give them the information we just didn't give it to them within the timetabled hour but as part of the induction day.

...Some people, the social events, some people went with that and some people raised eyebrows about it, the lecturers now I'm talking about, you know – “what are you doing bringing them off here?” This year we brought them off to the Royal Dublin Hotel for a half-day comedy event and we did other things at that day as well and it was brilliant and they really enjoyed it. They were all talking and chatting to each other and they had already made friends and that was the whole point.

**Q:** Really?

**Gerry:** Yeah, and ehm, but you know some people were asking should we be spending money bringing comedians into DIT, so ehm, well it's a fair point, but I would say you should have seen them all leaving. All their faces when they were leaving that evening – they really had fun! So I think it was a success this year so ehm...

They do get the information, but they tend to get it maybe a week later when actually it will mean more to them, do you know what I mean?

**Q:** Aha.

**Gerry:** You know – what is a counsellor, what are study skills, what is a chaplain – tends to make more sense to them a little further on down the line.

**Q:** The Friday afternoon was a mistake so you know....

**Gerry:** Yeah it was a disaster!

**Q:** ...that was totally picked up on, and you know they were actually saying they might have done to it if it wasn't on a Friday afternoon because they had the afternoon off. I think they only had practicals in the morning.

They also mentioned the fact that one day the Student Union Officer came in and they couldn't understand the point of it or what he was saying or going on about so he put them off going again.

Having said that, going back to the idea that you introduced this year, the event that you had in the hotel and has been a success – was this done in relation to you know the research that suggests that if students are going to drop out they will do so during the first couple of weeks?

**Gerry:** Yes it was. I mean Frank really got that point across if we didn't pick up on it, unless we nailed them, unless we got to them in the first couple of weeks they were gone. Some of them will stay until Christmas but you will lose a significant number of them in the first 2-3 weeks so really the idea is not to be bamboozling them, the idea is to make them feel comfortable. So that was the idea that the first few weeks are crucial so you know have the emphasis on the first few weeks with them associating with the place, with their classmates and things like that, so yeah that was definitely the emphasis. It was coming from what Frank was telling us what the literature was saying.

**Q:** Now I've noticed, not so much a huge dropout rate, but in comparison to other courses or years, dropouts since Christmas. Are you doing anything to try to retain some of those students who are thinking of dropping out to introduce the counsellor or the tutor again or...

**Gerry:** ...or what I think too, you could do something like study skills module when they actually need it, particularly if they were beginning to sink under all the assignments and everything. Maybe not too near Christmas now, maybe near the end of November or something like that, just when all the assignments are coming in. You know to run something like a study skills module you know to help them, like, "this is what you need to do; you've got a lot of assignments on etc." It might help I think particularly on the academic side if they're feeling a bit swamped but ehm.... Yeah I think there could be credit for it particularly for students who are thinking about leaving.

**Q:** But you'll still have students who have totally decided that after Christmas that, "that's it I'm gone".

**Gerry:** Yeah and certain circumstances that they have are just that's the way it is, you know what I mean, or in their personal lives something happens and they have to leave so maybe you know we can't keep them all.

**Q:** Yeah exactly. There was no mention of financial support. A lot of what was mentioned about the induction was about the information about college and leaving them off the last



couple of days of the week to find a flat. For a lot of students its their first time away from home, they've no idea how to budget...

**Gerry:** Yeah, that's right.

**Q:** They've probably no idea what their parents probably spent on putting them through college or school and now they have to do it themselves.

**Gerry:** That's right and to be honest that's something we were hoping to do this year was have somebody in to talk to them about financial management and budgeting and so on. I think there's someone over in Kevin Street Student Union who is a student advisor. But ehm it didn't happen this year, but it is a good idea to get someone to talk to them about budgeting. As a matter of fact I think the student union deals with that.

From year to year one of the problems I find is you end up dealing with different student union presidents when sometimes they're good and sometimes they're not, you know. In fact this year they were very good, they really got behind it, particularly with the event. That was not the case the previous year where, ehm, basically it was like pulling teeth!!

That is the problem that every year you're basically dealing with somebody else and you're basically at the mercy of who they are and are will they weigh in behind you or not you know and you might lets say...I presume the student union are going to ask someone and they might presume that I will have asked someone and that's fine but sometimes there's a bit of a problem there.

I think but I'm not sure that the student unions have someone who deals with money matters and things like that. Yeah I think they do.

**Q:** Its not rocket science that you're going to have to pay money out for these things, books, knives, uniforms etc, but some students don't realise just how much is involved. It would be an idea, you know how we're going modular next year, and it would be an idea lets say to give to the students a list...

**Gerry:** I think there is something given. Now I know the uniforms and that, they do get something out I think that they have to buy knives and uniforms and I think as far as I know they're told that and during induction week there is somebody here who sets up a little stand and they go to them and they order their knives and things like that. Now I'm not sure with



that information that they get before hand if the prices are on it, I'm not sure about that but if they're not, that's a very good suggestion that they should be or even a ball park figure. The other ones, I don't think they get anything with costs with regards books or things. Now that's a difficult one because not every lecturer requires them to get a book, you know what I mean?

**Q:** Yeah?

**Gerry:** In fact I'd say few people do apart from the knives and the uniforms.

**Q:** What about the induction and how important it is?

**Gerry:** I think ...it is you know, I've been at meetings with other faculties and it's interesting how things are done differently to what we are doing here. Like when I suggested what we were doing here there were people looking at me as if I had two heads; and at the timetables hour idea the previous year, ehm, for some people in particular its still an information barrage you know and that's all you do you just give them the information and you know whereas what we're finding is like those ice breaking sessions where they work together as teams and they start talking to each other and interacting with each other and the event and all that.

Having said that there are certain people, particularly the people you want to reach, and they simply won't go along to these events and essentially there is nothing you can do about that.

Definitely I think it is beneficially to do what we're doing, the problem with it, the only thing is, it does require more of an input though from staff and that's one thing I think we're lucky with here. A lot of people are very enthusiastic about induction. A lot of lecturers – you know when I asked one time could I get help from lecturers, there's usually a core of about 8 or 10 who usually say yes and they're very much into it and they're very much involved and that's great and it couldn't happen without that.

In general you are – it's a funny kind of thing induction –because you are very much at the mercy of you know the goodwill of the staff. You're at the mercy of the committee made up of various people who have different agendas and thing like that, ehm, so you know I don't think any induction...

The other thing too is how much it's backed by the school, do you know what I mean. I mean we're lucky that Joe (Dr. Joe Ruddy, (Acting) Head of School) is very supportive. I mean that idea of the timetabled hour; well ok, he put it on a Friday which was a mistake and that was the death knell for it but having said that he still dedicated an hour a week for induction on their timetable which was....Well he could have done it on a Tuesday it would have been perfect but you know that was just the way it went, but you know he was supportive in that regards. He's also supportive in that the buses had to be paid to bring them to the social event [treasure hunt last year and some students went to the aquatic centre this year] and things like that. So I think that's the other thing – its dependent on how much its supported both you know in terms of vocal support, financial support and in that regard I think we have been lucky in our school.

*[Time runs out as Gerry indicates he must go and take a class]*

**Q:** I know that it has been short and sweet but I just wanted to get a run down on what happens. I know I have been involved but to get it all recorded.

**Gerry:** Well particularly if you have to write it up you're going to have to do things officially.

**Q:** Is there any chance that I could get an outline of what happened last year and the year before?

**Gerry:** Sure yeah.

**Q:** I know you sent them on emails during September but I'm sure I don't have them anymore.

**Gerry:** No hassle, yeah.

**Q:** So I can get that and put it in as an appendix or whatever?

**Gerry:** No hassle at all.

**Q:** That's brilliant – well I'll let you know what happens. Thanks a million for doing this.

**Gerry:** No hassle.

**END**

**Appendix A (i): Induction Program and Outline 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 for the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management Course**

**Induction Program 2002/2003**

**Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management (DT 402/1)**

*Course Tutor: Lucy Horan*

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> September**

<u>Time</u>	<u>Schedule</u>	<u>Room</u>
2.00pm	Meet and Greet session with Course Tutor	KOS
2.30pm	Registration	KOS
4.00	Tea / Coffee Break	Cafeteria
4.30	'Getting to Know You' Session (Ice Breakers) with Course Tutors and Lecturers	Group 1 Room M1.04 Group 2 Room M1.07 Group 3 Boardroom Group 4 Room 28
5.30	Finish	

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September**

9.30 am	Course Introduction and Information Session (Course Tutor) ♦ Philosophy of the course ♦ Career Opportunities ♦ Subjects in each year ♦ Exams and continuous assessment ♦ Q&A session	KOS
10.30	Tea / Coffee Break	Cafeteria
11.00	Essential Information Session – (Students Union / Fire and Safety etc.)	Room 13
12.00	Orientation Session (Tour of the Building Tour of Annex Buildings)	Cathal Brugha Street, Marlborough Street, Sackville Place and Denmark Street
1.00pm	Lunch	
Afternoon	Class Event	Course Tutor to Decide

**Induction Program 2003/ 2004-05-12****Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management (DT 402/1)***Course Tutor: Lucy Horan***Monday 15<sup>th</sup> September****Time****Schedule****Room**

2.00pm	Meet and Greet session with Course Tutor	KOS
2.30pm	Registration	KOS
4.00	Tea / Coffee Break	Cafeteria
4.30	'Getting to Know You' Session (Ice Breakers) with Course Tutors and Lecturers	Group 1 Room M1.04 Group 2 Room M1.07 Group 3 Green Room Group 4 Room 29
5.30	Finish	

**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September**

9.30 am	Course Introduction and Information Session (Course Tutor) ♦ Philosophy of the course ♦ Career Opportunities ♦ Subjects in each year ♦ Exams and continuous assessment ♦ Q&A session	Room 25
10.30	Tea / Coffee Break	Cafeteria
11.00	Essential Information Session – (Students Union / Fire and Safety etc.)	Room 25
12.00	Orientation Session (Tour of the Building Tour of Annex Buildings)	Cathal Brugha Street, Marlborough Street, Sackville Place and Denmark Street
1.00pm	Lunch	
Afternoon	Class Event	Course Tutor to Decide

## **Timetabled Induction Hour Sessions 2002**

Sept 27	<b>Clubs and Societies</b>
Oct. 4	<b>College Support Services 1</b> (Chaplaincy / Counselling – to include ‘Transition to 3 <sup>rd</sup> level’ talk)
Oct. 11	<b>College Support Services 2</b> (Welfare Officer, Student Support Service, Medical Services, Disability Officer, Education SU)
Oct. 18	<b>Library</b>
Oct. 25	<b>Study Skills 1</b> (Time Management)
Nov. 1	<b>Study Skills 2</b> (Assignment / Report Writing)
Nov. 8	<b>Placement</b>
Nov. 15	<b>Careers</b>
Nov. 22	<b>Study Skills 3</b> (Revision Skills / Exam Techniques)

## **Schedules for Induction afternoon 2003**

### **KOS**

2.00	Support services
2.30	Careers / placement
3.00	Break
3.30	WebCt / Library
4.00	Clubs & Socs.
4.15	Entertainment
4.45	Finish

### **Royal Dublin**

2.30	WebCt / Library
3.00	Support services
3.30	Break
4.00	Careers / Placement
4.45	Clubs & Socs.
5.00	Entertainment
5.30	Finish

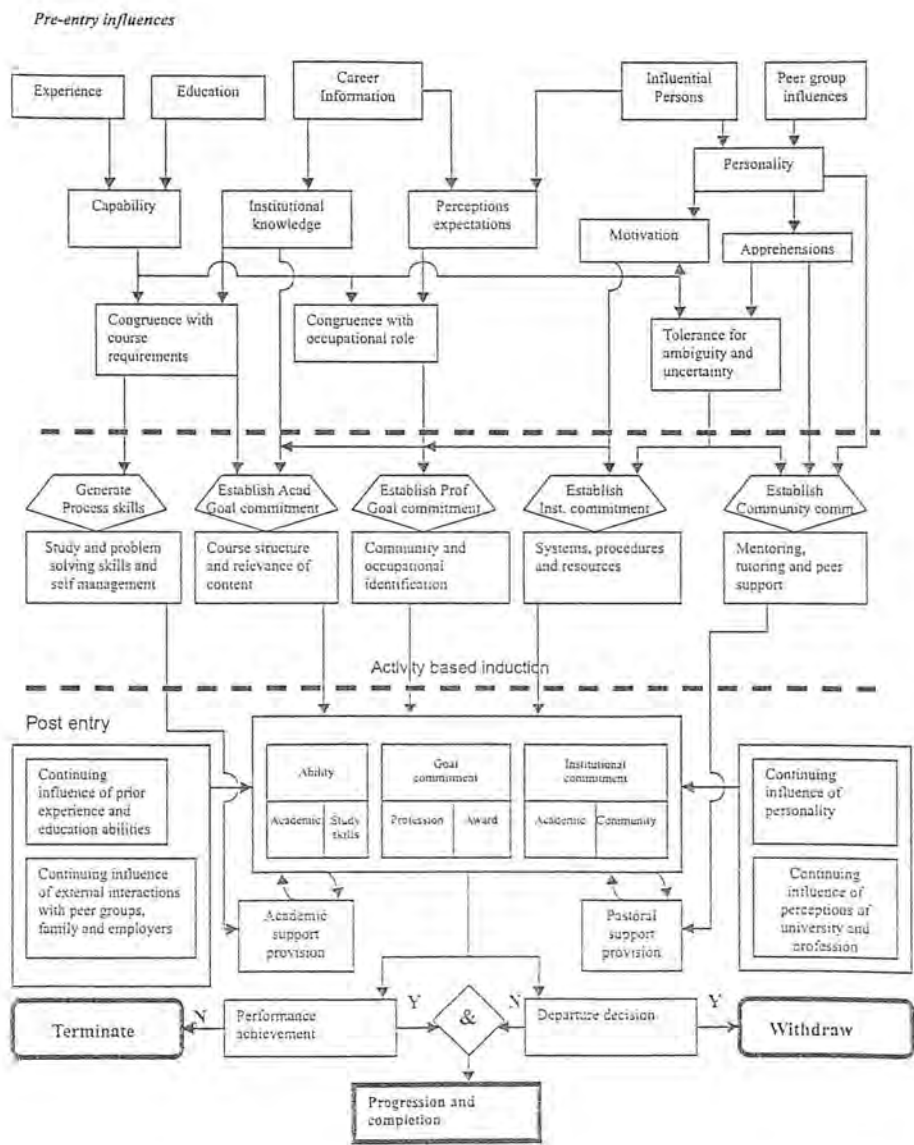
**Support Services** = Sister Margaret, Catherine Bolger, Pat Hoey (Michael Griffin)

**Careers / Placement** = Jill Barrett, Fidelma Keehan

**WebCt** = Kevin O Rourke, Keith Doyle



Appendix B: Tinto's 1975 Model of Post Entry Processes included in Edward's 2003 model of academic progression and the role of induction in the transitional process from secondary to higher education.



**Appendix C: Ethics Statement from Students**

**Ethics Declaration from Students Participating in Focus Group Interviews with Ann Conway during February & March 2004**

I \_\_\_\_\_( block capitals) of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management year 1 course (DT402 /1) being held in the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) 2003/2004 hereby agree to be involved in a focus group interview with Ann Conway to assist her with her research on The mystery of drop out students, retention and progression. I will hereby give her permission to record this interview and to use any information disclosed to her in this session and any subsequent sessions to support her research. I understand that any information disclosed will be of an anonymous nature. I have read and understood this statement and her accompanying statement regarding her research.

\_\_\_\_\_ (signature)\_\_\_\_\_ (date)

## **Appendix D: My Ethics Statements to the Interviewees**

### **My Ethics Statement – Ann Conway – researching the mystery of dropout students**

As an academic and lecturer to the students on the full and part time diploma in hotel and catering management I realise that I am in a position of responsibility and trust and hopefully the following statement will help to illustrate this:

*“Whilst carrying out this research, I will observe the highest possible ethical standards. I will maintain integrity at all times regarding data gathering. I will only report information that is in the public domain and within the law. I will avoid plagiarism and fully acknowledge the work of others to which I have referred to in this study. I will report my findings honestly. I consider the research project worthwhile and of benefit to the academic staff with whom I work, and the retention office here in DIT.*

I wanted to have a clear ethics statement for the reference of each interviewee who will be involved in this research but also for my own reference whilst carrying out this research. I have also informed both tutors of the full and part time diploma courses and the head of department, who have given me their support in this matter.

The study is designed to operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved directly in the research process, regardless of age, sex, race, religion, political beliefs, and lifestyle. I recognise the right of all individuals involved in the research to understand the importance of their participation but also their right to withdraw from the research at any time. I intend to debrief participants at the end of each interview and at the end of the research and to provide participants with copies of any reports or other publications arising from their participation. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be upheld at all times at their wishes, except in the case where participants indicate that they will allow their names to be used.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Ann Conway**

**Date:** February 20<sup>th</sup> 2003

**Appendix E: Student Performance by Course (DT402/1) adapted from Costello and Russell (2003)**

(Data received after both the summer and supplemental exams)

	Students' Result			Total
	Pass	Refer	Withdraw	
<b>DT402:</b>	31	17	23	71
Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management	43.7%	23.9%	32.4%	100%

**Figures for 2004 (June 2004)\***

(Data received after the summer exams)

	Students' Result			Total
	Pass	Refer/Repeat (Sept)	Withdraw	
<b>DT402:</b>	21	36	14	71
Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management	30%	51%	19%	100%

**Figures for C419 year 1 (June 2004)\***

(Data received after the summer exams)

	Students' Result			Total
	Pass	Refer/Repeat (Sept)	Withdraw	
<b>C419</b>	5	13	0	18
Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management	28%	72%	0%	100%

\* My thanks to Stuart Wilson in the exams office DIT Cathal Brugha Street for providing me with these figures after the summer exam boards were completed on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2004

**Appendix F: Permission received from Tutor of the Diploma in Hotel and Catering Management Full time course**

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October

Ann,  
Apology for not responding to your previous email I have no excuse to offer!!  
Yes of course you have my permission to conduct research with DT402!!! Do you mean the current 2nd and 3rd years or last years bunch? If you mean the current second/third years its a little too early for anyone to have dropped out and I am not aware of anyone who has done so yet. As regards students moving onto other courses perhaps if you ask Peter Griffin he will give you the names of people on his programme that have come from Dip and other places. Will you get back to me please Ann.

Regards  
Lucy  
-----Original

<b>From:</b>	Anne	Conway	[mailto:ann.conway@dit.ie]
<b>Sent:</b>	16	October	2003 16:00
<b>To:</b>			Lucy.Horan@dit.ie
<b>Subject:</b>	research		

Hi Lucy

In relation to the email I sent you last week about my Masters research, I was wondering if you could give me a list of students who have dropped out of second year DT402 this year, and if you would have the names of students from third year. I am hoping to interview them to see what they are doing now and to discover the factors that influenced them to drop out. I am also looking for students who have progressed onto other courses.

My proposal is due next week, but I don't need this list until after the proposal has gone through.

Thanks  
Ann